

EMBRACING FRAGILITY

LESSONS FOR OUR FUTURE
FROM BODIES IN PAIN

By Sharon V. Betcher

WHITE HUMILITY AND
THE FATE OF THE EARTH

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DANIEL BERRIGAN'S
WORKS OF MERCY

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Living with Purpose

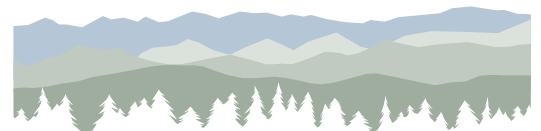


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"BERRIGAN BRINGS ROSES AND A BOOK, HOLDS HIS HAND, AND LISTENS."

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Known for his peace activism, Daniel Berrigan spent much of his life engaged in less visible works of mercy.

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Sojourners magazine (ISSN 0364-2097) is published monthly, except September-October is combined, at 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Periodicals Postage Paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Canadian Publications Sales Agreement #257494. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856.

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SOJOURNERS

**Verse
& Voice**



Verse of the day

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

- 1 John 3:17

Voice of the day

In a society that functions optimally, those who can should naturally want to provide for those who can't. That's how it's designed to work. I truly believe we're here to take care of one another.

- LeVar Burton

Prayer of the day

Lord, give us soft hearts that do not allow our eyes to turn away from those whom you have called us to look after. Let us never grow weary of serving others and seeking to turn their sorrow into joy.

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SOJOURNERS

From the Editor

Sojourners has gone through various phases since our founding almost 50 years ago. In the earliest days, we were an intentional Christian community that sought to effect change in the world around us, including through our magazine. Now we're a faith and justice magazine with historical roots in Christian community. There's a difference. But among the things that haven't changed in five decades is that for most of us here the language of "vocation," rather than "job," rings true, and that vocation is connected to the vision of helping to make the world a more just place.

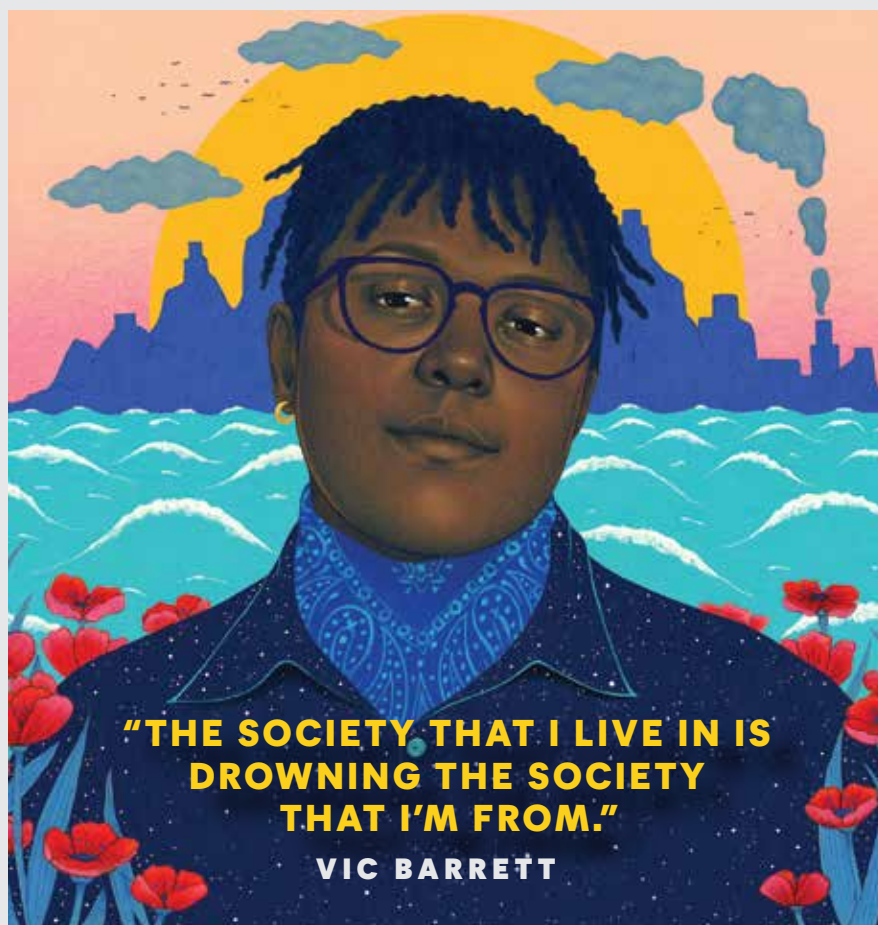
For our new art director, Candace Sanders (see facing page), that includes the opportunity to offer a platform to artists who are too often rendered invisible, especially in some church circles. For many people, Sanders says, "it's so hard to get your work seen—and people don't usually get art in those places where decisions are being made." Sanders looks forward to being a connecting link for underrepresented artists: "There's power in that," she says. "I don't take that lightly."

RESPONSE

I Needed This

"Beautiful, mindful breath prayer is much more grief-confronting than the blurted curses I've been using," Glenn Williams  wrote in response to "Jesus Gets Our Grief" (March 2021), in which Osheta Moore describes the daily spiritual breath practice she cultivated to combat the grief and anxiety brought on by living through a pandemic. Gloria Ferrell  added, "I like the words that [she] uses with it. I always do the inhale and exhale to calm myself." (Moore's favorites include "Nurturing Mother," "Kind Savior," and "Gentle Healer.") Lee Hollingshed extended her gratitude via email: "Thank you, Rev. Moore—you just helped me. I really needed this."

Write us: response@sojo.net



"YOU HAVE
TO ACT AS
IF IT WERE
POSSIBLE TO
RADICALLY
TRANSFORM
THE WORLD."

Angela Davis

Activist, author, and philosopher

CONTRIBUTING



Ed Spivey Jr.

In 1974, Ed Spivey heard God call him to leave the *Chicago Sun-Times* and join *Sojourners*. "I haven't heard from God since," he says. "But I've never looked back. I flourished here in ways I doubt I would have if not for *Sojourners*." Spivey reflects on his 46 years as art director on page 50. "I was part of a team that helped produce a great magazine. Now Candace brings the youthful perspective I lost decades ago. She gives *Sojourners* skills to move into the future."



Candace Sanders

"As a young person who is plugged-in culturally—whether that's racial, age, or cultural background—I bring a contemporary perspective to the magazine's art direction, building on the foundation that Ed laid," says new *Sojourners* art director Candace Sanders, whose love for design began with creating graphics as a hobby at age 14. "I fight to research new artists and give people opportunities because I know how important that is," she says. Candace wants *Sojourners'* "visuals to have as much impact as our words."

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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Michelle Alexander, Diana Butler Bass, Walter Brueggemann, Joan Chittister, Shane Claiborne, Danny Duncan Collum, Michael Curry, Edwidge Danticat, Marie Dennis, Julian DeShazier, E.J. Dionne Jr., Kelly Brown Douglas, Joshua DuBois, Michael Eric Dyson, Reta Halteman Fisher, Kenyatta R. Gilbert, Eddie Glaude, Wes Granberg-Michaelson, David Gushee, Cynthia L. Hale, Lisa Sharon Harper, Jen Hatmaker, Obery Hendricks, Carolina Hinojosa-Cisneros, Barbara A. Holmes, Joel Hunter, Kathy Khang, Grace Ji-Sun Kim, Anne Lamott, James Martin, Bill McKibben, Brian McLaren, Jeania Ree V. Moore, Otis Moss III, Ched Myers, Whitney Parnell, Eboo Patel, Myrna Pérez, Soong-Chan Rah, Richard Rohr, Alexia Salvatierra, Rob Schenck, Najeeba Syeed, Barbara Brown Taylor, Sharon E. Watkins, Cornel West, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Randy Woodley, Bill Wylie-Kellermann, Jenny Yang, Faith-Marie Zambé

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Hottest temperature ever recorded, August 2020 in Death Valley, Calif.

\$5.2 trillion

Amount spent globally on fossil fuel subsidies in 2017

46%

Percentage of U.S. homeowners in 2019 considering installing solar panels

OUR MISSION

The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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U.S.: \$39.95 one year print (for first-class mail, \$50). Digital subscriptions to Sojourners are available for \$19.95 at sojo.net/subscribe. **Australia:** \$78 one year (via air mail, paid in Australian currency, and sent to MediaCom, PO Box 610, Unley 5061 SA). **New Zealand:** \$97 one year (via air mail, paid in New Zealand currency, and sent to MediaCom, PO Box 9483, Wellington, NZ); email admin@mediacom.org.au. **Canada:** \$49.95 one year (paid in USD). **All other international** (six to eight weeks delivery): \$59.95 one year. **Air service overseas** (two to three weeks delivery): \$69.95 one year. Except where noted, payable in U.S. currency.

NEWSSTAND CIRCULATION

Newsstand circulation through Districor Magazine Distribution Services. For more information, call (905) 619-6565, fax (905) 619-2903, or email mraucci@districor.com.

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Advertisement in *Sojourners* does not imply editorial endorsement. For information on display advertising in *Sojourners*, please write to: Advertising, Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002; advertising@sojo.net; or visit sojo.net.

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1

HEARTS & MINDS

BY JIM WALLIS

ANSWERING THE CALL

The night Ed Spivey Jr. first came to our Sojourners community house in Chicago, he made me laugh. He still does, more than anybody else I have ever known. But it was also evident how serious he was about his faith and its meaning for his life. Ed was raised as a Southern Baptist, and he told us a funny story of how his Baptist pastor in Chicago wanted his congregants to wear a button to work that said, “I’m Excited!” When people ask why, you were supposed to say, “I’m excited about Jesus.” But Ed was in his first job after college—as art director of the *Chicago Sun-Times* Sunday magazine, where he was the youngest hire in the newsroom—and he was reluctant, to say the least. While he found the button idea tacky, it was clear that he was excited about following Jesus wherever that road would lead.

That’s what we talked about at our first dinner

**WE FORGOT TO
TELL ED THAT
COMMUNITY LIVING
STILL NEEDED
ROCK 'N' ROLL!**

“THINKING OF ED SPIVEY WILL ALWAYS MAKE ME SMILE.”

together. Some of us were still seminary students at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and we had just started a new publication called *The Post-American*, forerunner to *Sojourners*. None of us had ever done a publication before, or much writing beyond leaflets and school papers. Our art director was both temporary and part-time, and we would often wait weeks before our articles were laid out for printing. It took us by surprise when, at that first dinner, Ed said that he felt a strong calling from God to join us. “I am ready to quit my job at the *Sun-Times*, move in with all of you, and give my life to this.” Ed’s announcement called to mind the scripture we were then reading about how the earliest disciples acted when they heard a call from Jesus.

Ed’s departure from the *Sun-Times* was not without resistance. His parents were shocked he would

leave behind a great job, and the *Sun-Times* editor warned him against risking a promising journalism career on a marginal alternative publication that nobody had heard of, and which surely wouldn’t last. Ed moved into our apartment in the Uptown neighborhood of Chicago. (I still remember with a wince that, to reduce his material possessions before joining us, Ed gave away his great record collection. We forgot to tell him that community living still needed rock ‘n’ roll!) That was in October 1974, and Ed has been our art director ever since. Under Ed, *Sojourners* has won many awards for design—and also for his humor columns—in religious and secular categories of publishing. Ed’s work has helped shape our vision and mission—both in convicting words and compelling art. I will always consider Ed to be a co-founder of *Sojourners* and a lifelong friend. But Ed has been best known among the staff as the humble servant who always does what needs to be done—from cleaning the staff refrigerator and taking out the recycling to checking in on how people are doing.

Ed is also a musician, and he has been *Sojourners*’ principal guitar-playing worship leader. There were many tears when Ed played at our Zoom chapel service in February, his final month at *Sojourners* before his retirement. But, as many said in the virtual chat, Ed’s presence will always be with us. And thinking of Ed Spivey will always make me smile. ✱

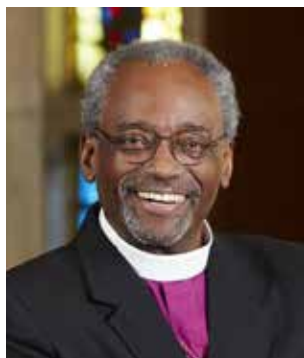


Jim Wallis is founder and ambassador of *Sojourners*.

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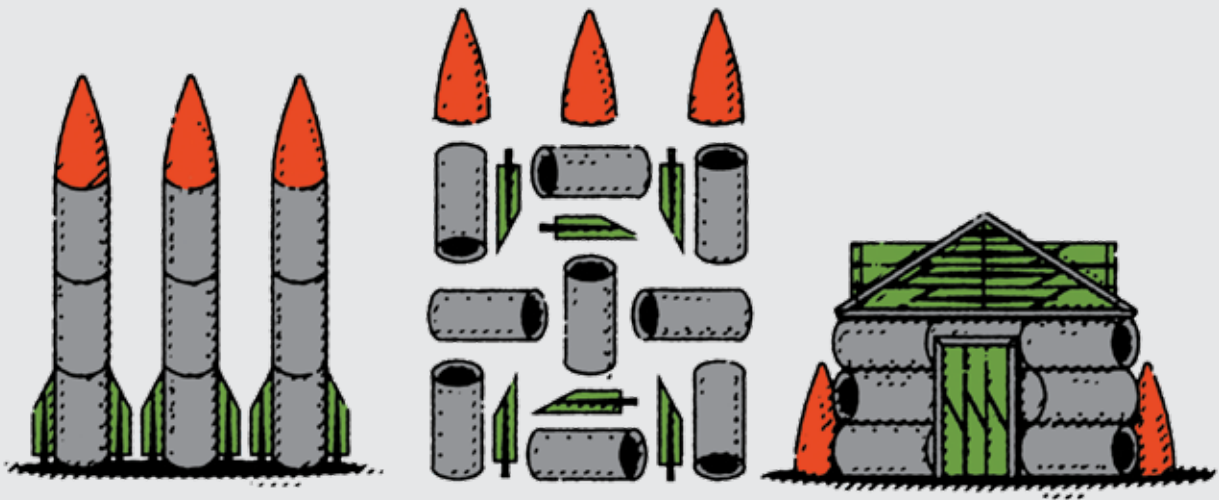
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BUILDING A NUCLEAR-FREE FUTURE

What the global ban on nuclear weapons means for the U.S.



2

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the first global ban on nuclear weapons, entered into force on Jan. 22. It is a bright spot in a bleak international landscape.

Negotiated by about two-thirds of the world's nations, the treaty represents a remarkable step toward the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. Civil society, including faith communities, played a significant role in establishing the treaty and now can work to advance its reach—including persuading the United States to join. The Holy See, one of the first states to ratify the treaty, described it as “one more blow on the anvil toward the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.’”

The treaty bans all countries from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, transferring, possessing, stockpiling, threatening to use, or allowing nuclear weapons to be stationed on their territory. It also prohibits countries from assisting, encouraging, or inducing anyone to engage in any of these activities and requires signers to take certain pro-

active measures to implement the accord.

Nuclear-free security strategies are now the norm around the world, not the exception. However, 39 countries, including the U.S., still explicitly base their military strategies on the potential use of nuclear weapons. Nuclear-armed states have not yet joined the process, but the treaty outlines a pathway for them to do so: They can join and immediately remove nuclear weapons from operational status and submit a time-bound plan for destroying the weapons, or they can destroy their nuclear weapons through a verified process of dismantlement and then join the treaty. In effect, the treaty delegitimizes these weapons of mass destruction around the world.

The positive obligations of treaty signers can impact the U.S. and other nonsignatory states. For example, all treaty signers must urge nonsigners to join, and state parties must assist individuals impacted by nuclear weapons and testing as well as provide environmental remediation in affected areas under their jurisdiction. Past weapons prohibitions, such as the bans on land mines and cluster munitions, led to changes in policies in nonsignatory countries, including companies ceasing production of banned weapons, divesting financial institutions from weapons manufacturers, instituting policies against use and transfer, and providing international assistance.

Civil society, and particularly the faith community, continues to have a significant role in advancing the norms against nuclear weapons. Members of the Christian Plowshares movement, which began in 1980, participate in nonviolent direct actions at U.S. nuclear facilities to protest the immorality of these weapons. From Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico to Honeywell Aerospace in Plymouth, Minn., to the Trident submarine base at King's Bay, Ga., U.S. citizens have made it clear that they want their government to play no part in these deadly weapons.

On Jan. 22, U.S. faith communities held actions and teach-ins to take that same message to laboratories developing nuclear weapons, universities assisting with nuclear weapons research and development, nuclear weapons bases, and companies producing parts for nuclear weapons. Civil society must continue to pressure institutions to extricate themselves from these weapons of mass murder and align with international law.

**THE TREATY DELEGITIMIZES
THESE WEAPONS OF MASS
DESTRUCTION AROUND THE
WORLD.**

In countries where the national government has not yet supported the treaty, majority public opinion, elected representatives, and local governments often *do* support it. In the U.S., members of Congress from at least seven states have endorsed legislation to support the treaty. Americans should continue to work with members of Congress and local governments to adopt resolutions urging the U.S. to join the treaty.

In Nagasaki, in 2019, Pope Francis said, "We must never grow weary of working to support the principal international legal instruments of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation, including the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons." Persuading the U.S. to join the treaty and abolish nuclear weapons will not be easy. But for international peace and the future of humanity, it is necessary. ❖

Beatrice Fihn is executive director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017.



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COMMENTARY

BY RACHEL ANDERSON



GOD BLESS THE CHILD

Many nations have great family plans.
What's wrong with the U.S.?

The first stages of parenting are sometimes called “the longest shortest time,” as an award-winning podcast on parenting attests. For a newborn and a new parent, the days are dense. Everything matters.

In the United States, many families’ caregiving-rich days of new parenthood are curtailed by work. A fifth of new mothers return to work within days or weeks of having a child, often driven by financial precarity. More than half of parents surveyed who were able to take some parental leave from work said they took less time off than they needed or wanted, the majority citing fear of lost income or jobs. As one mother, a call center employee with a newborn, said in an interview for a 2018 Center for Public Justice report, “My work doesn’t pay for maternity leave ... If I don’t go back to work in two weeks, we will not have enough money to pay our electric bill.”

From the biblical account of creation through the prophets’ visions of shalom, Christian tradition presents family life as fundamental to human life and society. Essayist Wendell Berry reasoned that a good human economy is one that “proposes to endure.” The nurture of chil-

dren and care for loved ones, of course, is one way our society endures.

Following industrialization, many nations enacted pro-family policies to protect family caregiving. Publicly funded “mothers’ pensions” enabled widowed and single mothers to parent children in the home. Beginning in the 1950s, nations began to develop leave programs to ensure parents could access time off *with pay* following the birth or adoption of a child.

The benefits of paid leave for new parents are well documented. In 1977, Norway replaced an unpaid job protection program with four months of *paid* maternity leave. Thirty years later, high school graduation, college attendance, and earnings were higher for children whose mothers had paid leave, according to a 2015 analysis. Multinational studies associate increased weeks of paid maternity leave with lower rates of infant and child mortality.

While other nations expanded their family policies, protections shrank in the U.S. Mothers’ pensions fell by the wayside, replaced by anti-poverty programs that remain embattled to this day. Not until the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act did the U.S. require some employers to provide some employees with job-protected *unpaid* leave for parenting.

Nearly three decades have passed since the Family and Medical Leave Act was enacted. It is time for the U.S. to take the next step. Because outcomes for child well-being are so clearly demonstrated, a paid parental leave proposal should be designed with child welfare in mind. One policy that could achieve this goal with bipartisan support is a simple, flat-cash benefit covering 18 to 24 weeks of paid parental caregiving. The publicly funded benefit should be sizeable enough—\$600 per week per child—that parents are empowered to take time off. According to an analysis I co-authored with Lyman Stone for the Institute for Family Studies, such an approach would ensure that every child’s early life is free of unnecessary material deprivation.

Child-centered parental leave should be universal—not a reward for parents’ work record but an investment in each child’s worth and future. ✦

Rachel Anderson is a resident fellow at the Center for Public Justice and director of Families Valued.

COMMENTARY

BY MAE ELISE CANNON

I

CHRISTIANS IN
THE CROSSFIRE

In 2019, I met with leaders from the Nahla Valley in Iraqi Kurdistan whose eight villages are both Muslim and Christian. Entire villages had been forced to evacuate when they were caught in the crossfire between rocket attacks launched from Turkey against Kurdish militias in northern Iraq. Children and community members were traumatized.

This February, border communities in northern Iraq were attacked again, this time by militants using Iranian-supplied weapons. Several rockets exploded in Irbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. One rocket hit the U.S.-led coalition military base, killing a civilian contractor from the Philippines and injuring at least six others. Many interpret the Irbil attack as a test of the Biden administration's Iran policy, which seeks to revive the nuclear deal scrapped under the previous U.S. administration. President Joe Biden retaliated with airstrikes targeting Iranian-backed militias on the border in Syria—killing 22 people. The minority communities, including Christians, living in the Kurdish regions of neighboring Turkey, Syria, and Iraq continue to be caught in the middle as geopolitical conflicts escalate.

Christians have lived in the border regions of what is now called Iraqi Kurdistan, the historic homeland of the Assyrians, since the Middle Ages. During the 1800s, inspired by European nationalism, these Christians increasingly identified as Assyrians rather than Arabs. Now Christian refugees from Syria are also arriving in northern Iraq, displaced by more than a decade of civil war in their own country.

The Assyrian Christian communities have faced the threat of extermination before—first under the Ottomans during World War I and then under the Islamic



State group. In the years following the Islamic State group invasions, the situation for Christians and other minority groups in Kurdistan, such as the Yazidis, has been tenuous. Conflict escalation such as airstrikes from Turkey, missile attacks from Iran, and ground assaults by Islamic State groups and others have resulted in damage to property, livestock, and livelihood, as well as trauma, fear, and sometimes physical harm and loss of life in these minority communities. Now, as geopolitical tensions worsen between Iraq, Iran, Syria, and the U.S., the threat of extermination rises again. Fear on the ground increases. Will their communities survive another spiral of violence and retaliation?

Our 2019 visit included traveling with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), an international organization that accompanies communities experiencing violence, to visit Kashkawa, a village near the Turkish border. CPT members worked with that community to document human rights abuses and record the impact of cross-border bombings. At the Assyrian church there, Christians prayed over us in Aramaic, the language of Jesus, that the bombings would stop.

One plea from the people of Kashkawa was that Christians in the U.S. would challenge our government to stop direct and proxy military interventions. With renewed U.S. missile attacks as well as militant violence this year, the plea from Kashkawa remains. ✱

**RELIGIOUS
MINORITIES IN
NORTHERN IRAQ
ARE CAUGHT IN
THE MIDDLE OF
GEOPOLITICAL
CONFLICTS.**

Mae Elise Cannon, author of *Beyond Hashtag Activism*, is executive director of Churches for Middle East Peace.

IN SEARCH OF MY MOTHER'S GARDEN

3



This spring, my mother and I did something we have not done together since I was in junior high school: a creative, collaborative liturgical project. Starting when I was about 4 years old, my mother and I would make Christmas cards each year to give to our family and friends. She provided the text, usually in the form of her own biblically and seasonally inspired poetry, and I, an avid drawer, would illustrate her words. We continued this tradition for more than 10 years.

When the church I now attend invited contributions for a crowd-sourced congregational Lenten devotional booklet this year, my mother came up with an idea. She was, as she wrote, “A mom inspired by a thought—as Paul wrote letters to his beloved children and friends in faith ... so could I write a letter to my daughter.” Following the model of the Pauline epistles, my mom wrote me a letter of spiritual encouragement

**SHE WAS NOT SIMPLY
FOLLOWING IN PAUL'S FOOTSTEPS,
BUT IN GOD'S.**

and advice on navigating wilderness, a key feature of both Lent and life. I decided to respond and thank her with a letter of my own. Together, the individual expressions of our relationship became a communal project.

In contemplating our project, I see a creation whose significance is more than the sum of its parts, so to speak. The joint submission of correspondence between my mother and me is not simply a nostalgic return to a lapsed family tradition. Rather, it is a reflection of a profound theological aspect of our relationship: the cultivation of selves in the space of love.

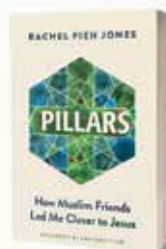
When people ask me how I became a writer or what sparked the writing bug, I usually reference certain papers I wrote in seminary, where complex theological thinking merged with my ongoing interests in my heritage and justice issues, empowering me to produce writing both personally meaningful and professionally significant. Thinking back, however, I know the seeds were planted much earlier. As a child, I was exposed not only to a love of reading but also a love of writing through my mother, who gave me journals and constantly invited me to collaborate and participate in creative writing projects, such as the Christmas cards. Her love of written expression encircled me, educated me, formed me, and, over time, drew me into becoming the writer I am today.

Put another way: My mother's missives formed a constant invitational aspect of our relationship. It was a theological action. The offering of her own gifts invited and cultivated my own. In this way, she was not simply following in Paul's footsteps, but in God's, mothering me in a manner that elicited my voice and brought me forth into myself more fully.

In Alice Walker's essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," she writes about the importance of perceiving the lines that connect mother and daughter and bequeath heritage, gift, and identity. I am grateful this year to have apprehended those lines a little more clearly. ❖

Jeania Ree V. Moore is a writer, United Methodist deacon, and doctoral student in religious studies and African American studies at Yale University.

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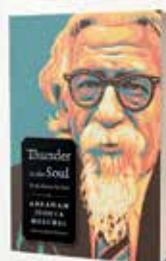
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DEEP ECONOMY

BY BILL MCKIBBEN

WHEN CRISES CONVERGE



T

The irritating thing about the Bible—well, one irritating thing about it—is that it keeps instructing us, in unambiguous terms, to do things we don’t want to.

On the first page it tells us to take care of the earth, which is quite embarrassing now that we’re fiddling with the thermostat

and killing off large numbers of the creatures that we are supposed to look after.

Of course, it gets much worse once we reach the gospels and we’re told to take care of the poor and—well, I mean, come on, stop the steal. Nastiest of all is the quite specific demand to welcome the stranger. Clearly, we’re not into that—nearly three-quarters of white Christians voted for the candidate whose senior policy adviser, Stephen Miller, once said, “I would be happy if not a single refugee foot ever again touched American soil.”

These various unreasonable demands become even more unreasonable as time goes on, because they start to converge. Because we failed to take care of the earth, instead burning massive amounts of coal and gas and oil, we raised the temperature, and because hurricanes draw their

WE HAVE CREATED THE STRANGER AT THE BORDER.

power from the heat in the ocean, we now have more of them—this past season we set a record in the Atlantic, with a nonstop procession of storms that exhausted the regular alphabet and drove us deep into the Greek one. Hence, it was storms Eta and Iota that crashed into Central America in November, causing incredible wreckage: By some early estimates, Honduras saw damage equivalent to 40 percent of its GDP. (Katrina, one of America’s worst storms, cost us 1 percent of our GDP.) Not surprisingly, Honduras is now an even more difficult place to live—indeed, for many people an impossible one, given that food and shelter, which are actually necessary for survival, can’t be found.

Now those people are heading north, and some of them will reach our border, and there they will ask for refuge. And when they make that request, it is important for us to remember that the people of Honduras weren’t responsible for burning much of that coal and gas and oil. Central American countries are rounding errors in the global calculation, while those of us in the U.S.—a mere 4 percent of the world’s population—account for more carbon in the atmosphere than any other people on earth. The prosperity (ill-apportioned as it is) that underwrites our food and shelter comes in no small part from having burned more fossil fuel than anyone else. In a more accurate lexicon, those hurricanes would not have been Eta and Iota, but Suburb and SUV.

It would have been smarter to follow the biblical instruction manual early on, watching out for creation. We didn’t, so now the “welcome the stranger” part applies double to us: We have created the stranger at the border. And so, as with many things, better late than never.

Or, as an alternative, we could look for a new book. ❖

Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org and a *Sojourners* contributing editor, is the author most recently of *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?*

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EYEWITNESS

4



“WHAT IS THIS
CALLING US
TO BECOME?”



‘LIMINAL TIME IS GOD’S TIME’

“I woke up one morning and noticed a sign on everybody’s door: ‘Stay in your room.’ So, we got on the phone and called each other. We found out COVID-19 was in the house. Six sisters had it throughout the convent.

It was a time of a lot of fear. There was no ritual—things we’ve been doing for over a hundred years. We could not have daily Mass. We could not even go to our chapel. We had Thanksgiving alone in our rooms.

For Christmas, the sister who was the coordinator of the house suggested that we write Christmas cards to all the sisters in the care center. It was a lot of writing, but it was wonderful because we felt like it was giving them a little visit. We were finding ways to lift spirits.

I do grief support groups connected with the parish where I minister. They found out it was my birthday and created a parade of 20-some cars with balloons coming out of the windows, tooting their horns, waving, singing. One guy knew I was turning 76, so in his car he played ‘76 Trombones.’

All of a sudden, I had time. I had more time, above all, to pray.

We’re holding our breath [for the vaccine]. We know that it’s going to be soon. The number one thing I’m looking forward to upon vaccination is being able to celebrate in our chapel. I want to be with my sisters. I want to gather the grief support group.

Liminal space is exactly where the world is right now. When we are in a liminal space, we have no control. We can’t go backward; we can’t go forward. That’s the only time that God has full control.

Liminal time is God’s time, it’s a kairos time. What is this calling us to become?” ❖

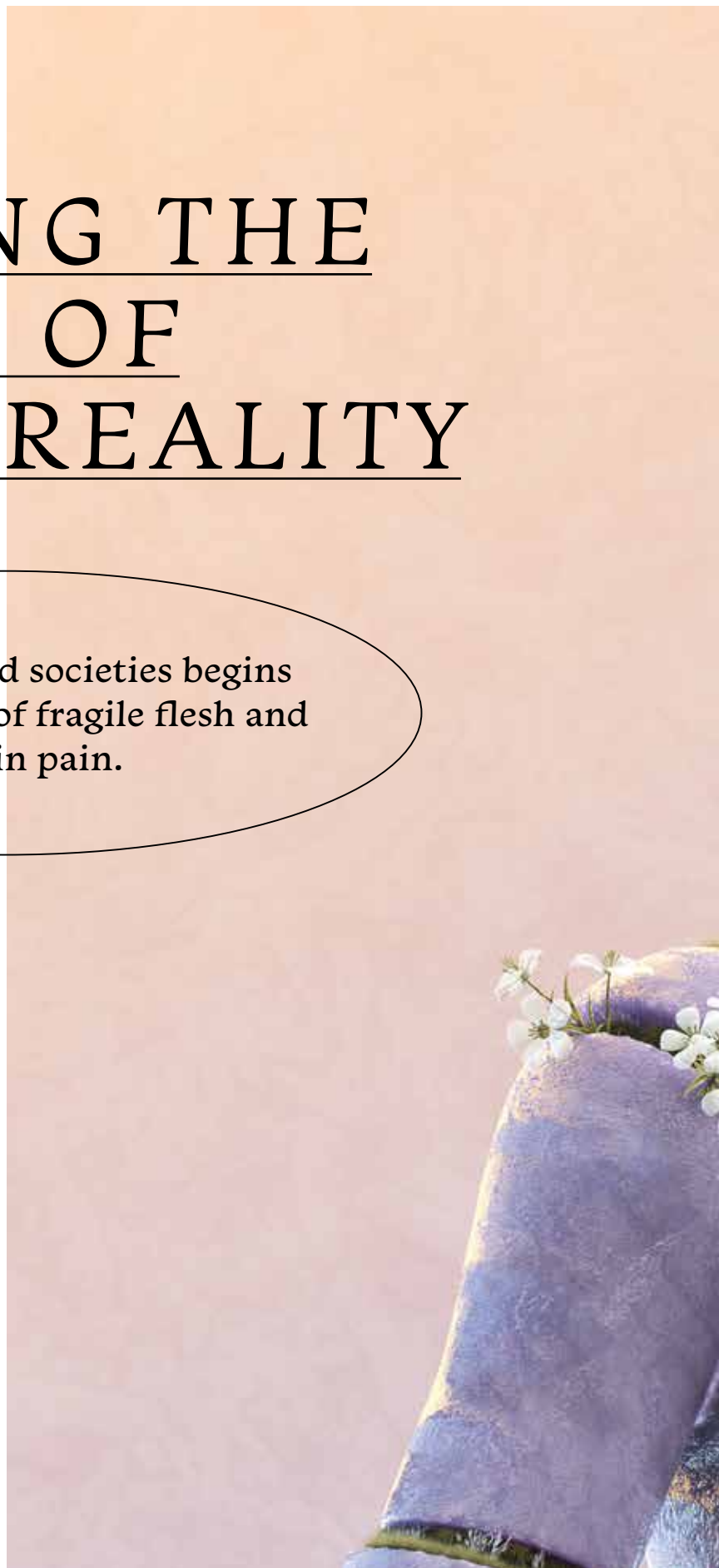
Mary Elizabeth Mackowiak, a Felician Catholic sister, lives with her community near Buffalo, N.Y., and is a spiritual director and grief counselor. She spoke with Sojourners’ Jenna Barnett.

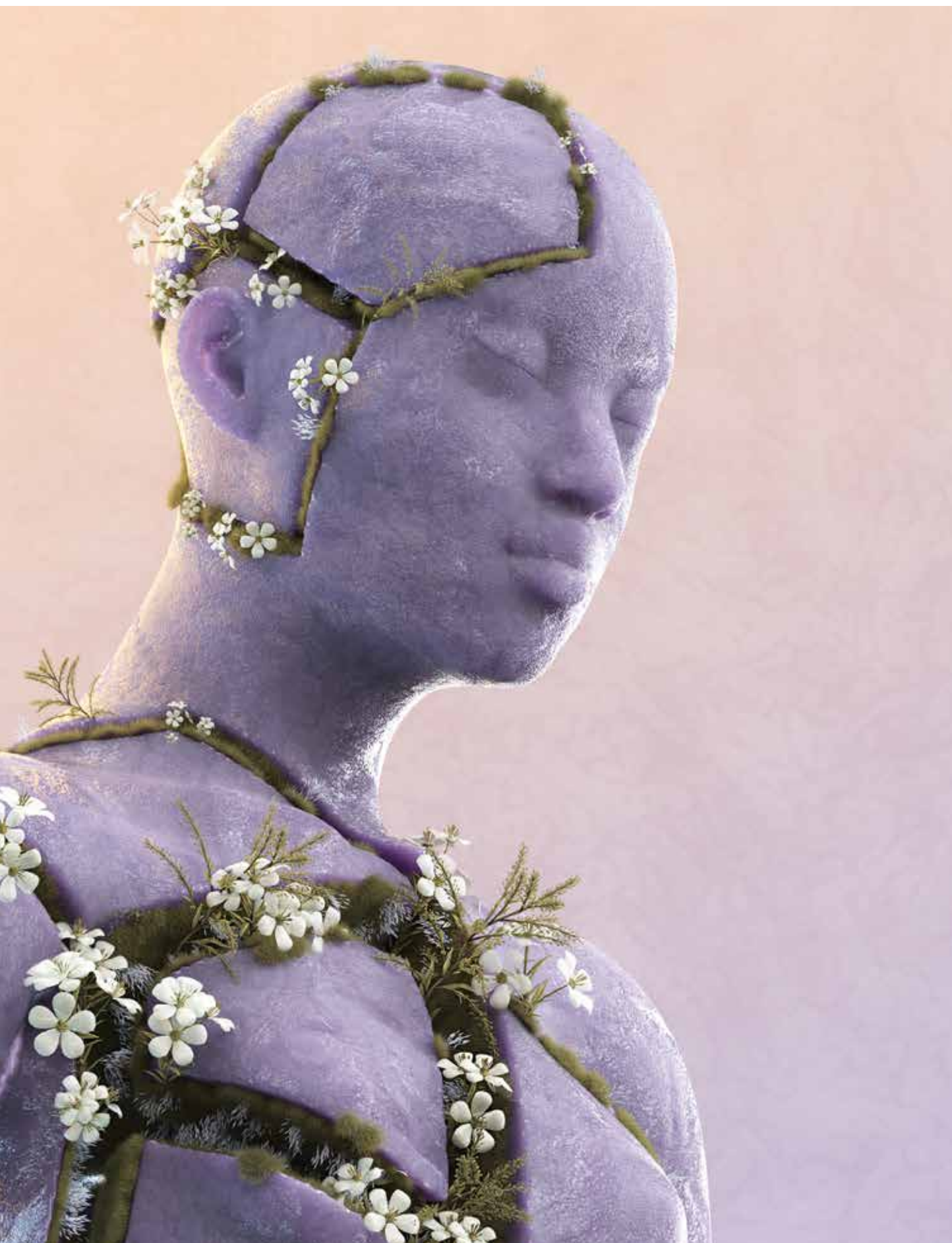
BEARING THE BRUNT OF CORPOREALITY

Hope for souls and societies begins
with the embrace of fragile flesh and
bodies in pain.

By Sharon V. Betcher

Illustrations by
Kylan Luginbühl





As we enter the second year of the pandemic, craving juices our throats. We just want to feel alive again: to hear spontaneous laughter and song; to lay our eyes on one another without the mediation of Zoom; to smell a grandchild's neck without the filter of a mask; to brush against the crowd, breaching the numbness of isolation. We just want to get back to normal, we say. But normal, as science writer Ed Yong observes, is precisely what led to this. Even epidemiologist Michael Osterholm worries that we are "trying to get through this [pandemic] with a vaccine without truly exploring our soul." Curiously, that puts the depths of soul on the public health agenda.

INSIGHT THERAPY

COVID-19 has been an epiphany. It has given humanity a first comprehensive, planetary broad brush-up. The pandemic likely was set in motion through ecological disruption, when viruses were loosed from their wild hosts into human sociality, then proceeded to shatter along our nation's habituated social fault lines—economic, racialized, gendered, and generational.

Every aspect of the coronavirus pandemic first exposed and then exacerbated the United States' devastating inequalities, reports one investigative journalist after another. The biases of societal racism, classism, and sexism become, in turn, endemic to housing patterns, employment, and access to health care and healthy food. Compounded by the accumulated effects of environmental inequality, such biases become diseases of the body and its generations. Those we cheer on as "essential workers," the U.S. has come to recognize, were often people whom it first dehumanized—people of color and women working in precarious scenarios of exposure and at low wages. As our planet heats up, each consequent emergency threatens to exacerbate the same fault lines.

While COVID-19 has turned out to be a far more cruciform epiphany than we might have desired, it has, if we are lucky, shaken our sense of invulnerability: Our well-being is entangled, one with another—from how we treat the environment to wearing masks and social distancing. Bodies aren't born innocent, but from birth carry unequal burdens.

I was, in years past, swept up in infection and have been left crip, perhaps by this: milk, which, as a child of subsistence farming, I drank fresh off the pasture. Given winds sweeping from the Southwest over the upper Midwest in the late 1950s, that milk was laced with irradiated particulate from the nuclear test flats. A failed thyroid, that fuse of the immune system, could not manage a superbug infection, and so I live as an "unprostheticized" amputee. If others revulse, this canyon on my hip is likewise an epiphanic fracture.

JESUS' THEOLOGY OF DESIRE

As life slowly opens after quarantine, it will be as tempting to withdraw our gaze from the epiphany of this past year as it is to avert eyes from my presence. What makes this christiform epiphany less than merely dystopic, given the planet's rising peril, is the fact that we can

learn to swim against the affective tides of disaffection and revulsion that have, until COVID-19, hidden under the oceanic surface of "normal." These biases, these geosocial and economic fault lines, are the consequences of our behavior toward each other. Like the rest of our national infrastructure, we can as humans "build back better." We can critically examine the tree rings of flesh, these archaeological "tells," and share the precarious vulnerability of flesh more justly.

Christianity too has ways of training up the muscles of soul in the presence of pain. Theologian Dorothee Sölle surmised that the gospels might have been—given that Christianity is a theology of desire (hence, love) and given that stories generate affect or feeling—"written for our instruction." As narrative forms created to rouse passion through meditative practice, passion accounts begin a process of transference whereby loving the God who is in pain—that is, Jesus as suffering—we begin to open ourselves to feel all flesh in the reality of its extremes. Rather than launching our aspirations heavenward, these passion practices help us develop the arteries of love—as justice, generosity, and hospitality—within our civic space. By mindfully breathing into our relations, we might swerve the taste for "normal" and grow the moral arc of justice across the quaking fault zones.

IN THE PRESENCE OF AFFLICTION

COVID-19 will leave us a swath of bodies in pain—bodies that are long-haulers or concave with grief, the loss of a job, a business, or "a future." Persons are exhausted from balancing too many intimate care relations with work, little money, and inadequate food. America's national character has long demanded we push pain out of sight, out of mind—whether through technological marvel, making economics "the" index of well-being or consigning devastation to "third world literature," as Amitav Ghosh reminds us. Pauline streams of Christianity, wherein pain is owed to "the bondage to decay," do likewise (Romans 8:21)—as if life could avoid the wheel of transience.

Conditioned to progress and valorizing overcoming, our culture remains, spiritually speaking, unskillful toward bodies in pain. Someone as visibly crip as I am quickly learned that under the surface of normalcy hides a disgust impulse threatening "good riddance"—hence, ancient practices of exposure or even, in our era,

CORONAVIRUS HAS PUT THE DEPTHS OF SOUL ON THE PUBLIC HEALTH AGENDA.

murder. (Think: “hate crimes.”) We have witnessed just such disgust exercised against vulnerability when some refuse to accept mask-wearing as something we do for the other. A political system devoted to protecting its own “economic engine” has shown its callousness toward elders (“It’s just old peoples’ flu!”), if not always also earth’s elemental others. Whether making “gut reactions” a theological bottom line or redlining persons out of conditions of well-being, spasms of disgust control the affective gates of “interbeing.”

While disgust in the forms of bias, bigotry, and disregard may be among its more obvious guises, disgust also acts like a propellant within the desire for “wholeness.” As wholeness was valued among modern hopes for progress, it likewise migrated into biblical interpretation and Christian liturgies. Yet the racial lines of modernity were affected as an aesthetic analytics whereby wholeness was sorted from what was construed as “the degenerate types”—“two little feet” versus disability, normal versus abnormal, and white and male over persons of color and female. Despite “the enlightenment” of reason, we have unskillfully allowed disgust to pull us neighbor from cosmopolitan neighbor. Using disgust, hidden in the guise of aesthetic taste, the fragile conditions of flesh have been offloaded along the very fault lines evidenced in and exacerbated by the pandemic.

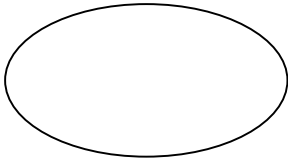
REMAKING OUR CONDITIONED AVERSIONS

Twentieth-century French philosopher and worker-activist Simone Weil found a little-used spiritual practice within Christian texts: “Disgust in all its forms is one of the most precious trials sent to a [person]” as a way to work on the self.



AS FLESHY
BEINGS ALL,
WE LIVE IN
UNSECURED
VULNERABILITY.





Weil suspected that spiritually working through the roiling nausea of disgust—not naturalizing the gut reaction so as to sort in-group versus out-group sociality—would bring us into sacred encounter. Meditating on Psalm 22:24, “For [God] did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted,” Weil surmised that love could learn to move through the wakes of disgust with equanimity to remake our conditioned aversions. To break “the law of gravitation by which humans attack that which revulses us” would be, as Weil saw it, to inhabit the soul of Christ.

To love Jesus is to remember him too as crip and to work justice off of the fractures of his body. Jesus was a Roman torture victim, and as the gospels remember him, one among the Isaianic lineage of “suffering slaves” (not congenial “servants”), like those for whom he agitated.

Nothing was as true of slavery in the ancient world as its “absolute corporeal vulnerability.” (Does that not ring true to today’s “essential workers”?) And nothing then so marked the slave as disfigurement—the hobbled foot, the punctured ear, the muted voice, the body worked over and worn. In that world as in this one, redemption required not a *cure* (in other words “wholeness”), which simply moves a body from one side of the caste hierarchy to the other. Rather, redemption required and requires us to swerve the calculus of empire, which buffers the well-being of some bodies from the fragility of flesh by making others bear the brunt of corporeality. Where empire created economic fault lines and exacerbated those both ethnic and gendered, Christians seamed kinship by way of adoption and neighborliness and equality across the quake zones.

THE CORPOREAL MUSCLE OF GENEROSITY

Set in the interstices of the ecological web, “wholeness” harbors not only disgust with

flesh, but resentment against an evolving cosmos. In fact, wholeness is more an aesthetic and narcissistic artifice that jams psychic vitality and occludes the diverse arteries of love—generosity, mercy, hospitality, compassion. These arterial flows rather demand that we become inclined to one another “at the level of corporeality.”

Generosity, philosopher Rosalyn Diprose has noted, is not so much about “the expenditure of one’s possessions but the dispossession of oneself, the being-given to others that undercuts any self-contained ego.” Finding the ligatures of this muscle deep in corporeality—under the crown of ego and just where disgust threatens to repel us—begins to explain why and how “soul” might be a concomitant of public health.

A demonstrative example of the corporeal nature of soul might be in order: I met David and Jonathon, two adolescent males, in my first unit of wheelchair training. Both of them—in separate mountain biking accidents—suffered spinal injuries. Born of their shared suffering was a friendship of visceral depth, even as both were also typical young, straight males—not wanting to show too much feeling, covering their own pain in humor and antics. Then came the day we were to practice picking ourselves up from a fall by first intentionally flipping ourselves so as to occasion a spill out of our wheelchairs. Jonathon dared to go first but owing to the chaotic—and not yet habituated—firing of nerves in his still-newbie quadriplegic body, he convulsed as he spilled over. In that moment, David’s compassion for his friend literally pulled him likewise into a gut-coiling spasm that took him slithering out of his own chair and onto the ground.

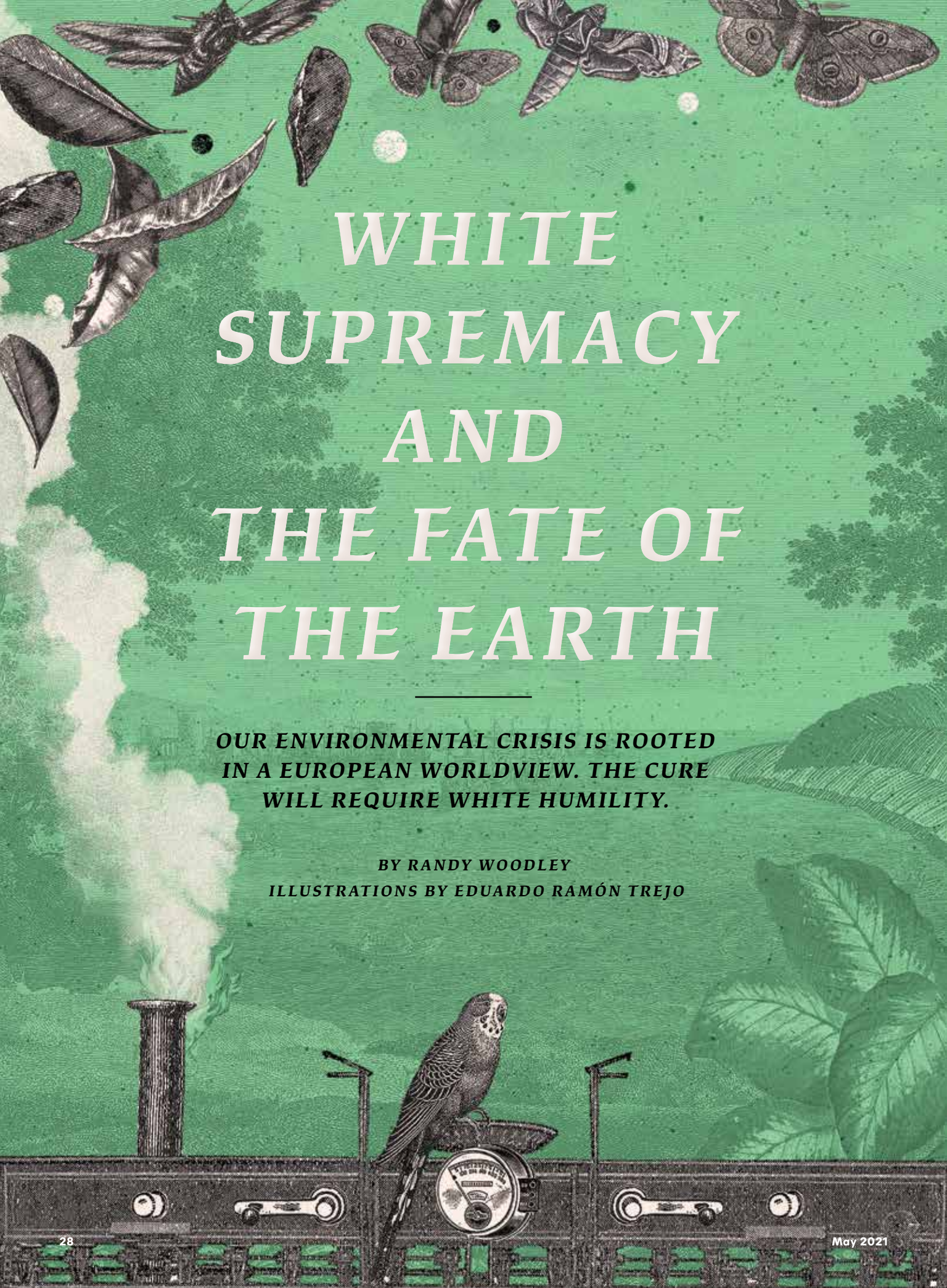
This zone of interdependent feeling—below will and reason and in an openness that is deeply corporeal and affective—seems to me to be of the soulful nature of how we might faithfully tend the epiphany offered by COVID-19 and so create “a new normal” of just wage, fair access to food and health, hospitable civic space, and equal regard.

STAYING WITH THE TROUBLE

Philosopher of science Donna Haraway does not acknowledge that her conviction in the face of our planetary emergency—and consequently her book’s title, *Staying with the Trouble*—rehearses the vow of the bodhisattva tradition of compassion toward suffering beings. But as she knows, we will, for the rest of our presence as a species on “Eaarth” (as Bill McKibben renames our familiar yet utterly transfigured planet), live our flesh as enfolded through what we have leaked into the environment, even while we could, with passionate discipline, unmake social fault lines. To “stay with the trouble,” as Haraway conceived it, is to make “decisions [that] take place ... in the presence of those who will bear their consequences,” including the broad swath of elemental beings. As she puts it, this choice is “both more serious and more lively” for “we become-with each other or not at all.”

As fleshy beings all, we live in unsecured vulnerability. Of bacteria and viruses in evolutionary time, we have been fearfully and wonderfully made. Amid such cosmological as well as social vulnerability, what makes life sweet is equally as fragile as flesh: the whispers of love and promise. These bespeak no hope that sweeps away histories of flesh. What we can offer each other is but this: the vow to live as one obligated to another. And that requires learning more skillfully to swim against the tide of disgust and to practice the corporeal muscle of generosity so as to shelter each other. *

Sharon V. Betcher is an independent scholar, crip philosopher, and farmer living on Whidbey Island, Wash. She is the author of *Spirit and the Obligation of Social Flesh* and *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement*.

The background is a vibrant green with a textured, painterly quality. At the top, several butterflies and moths are depicted in flight. On the left, a plume of white smoke rises from a factory chimney. In the foreground, a parrot with brown and white feathers is perched on a metal structure. The bottom of the image shows a dark, industrial-looking base with various mechanical components like valves and pipes.

WHITE SUPREMACY AND THE FATE OF THE EARTH

**OUR ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS IS ROOTED
IN A EUROPEAN WORLDVIEW. THE CURE
WILL REQUIRE WHITE HUMILITY.**

**BY RANDY WOODLEY
ILLUSTRATIONS BY EDUARDO RAMÓN TREJO**

Change is difficult, great change even more so. Yet some things change naturally over time with seemingly little effort—the course of a river, the shore of an ocean, the direction a tree decides to grow. When humans interfere with the course of nature in an unnatural and thoughtless manner—such as by damming a river or clear-cutting a forest—we are bound to experience unknown and often unwanted consequences. But perhaps reverting to more natural systems of change will not be as difficult as we imagine.

Western civilization is just beginning to realize that nature is wiser and more powerful than we are and will, without a doubt, outlive us. She knows her mind, and she understands what keeps life in balance. Because today we seldom see nature in her unmolested glory, we rarely consider the degree to which Western civilization has changed that which is natural to what is now unnatural. Since time immemorial, Indigenous people have learned to observe natural change and tried to flow with it, or bend it to their benefit.

Now, like never before, we need people with keen observational skills to help us recover and retain the truths in nature. Indigenous wisdom's long relationship with creation is based on an ethic of harmony, humility, and respect. Such efforts need not always contradict Western notions of science. Modern scientific methods often confirm the truths that our Indigenous teachers have always known. Science verifies what scientists observe. In more than one sense, our Indigenous elders have always been scientifically aware. Western scientists use tools that tell them the hydrological cycles have changed. Our elders know the huckleberries are ripening a month later than they always have. I have heard from elders in the past few years that our medicine plants are not nearly as potent as they used to be. They say the earth is weakening; an unnatural change has occurred. Western science has come to the same realization by explaining that as more carbon is released into the atmosphere, plants are less able to develop the nutrients needed. Both observe verifiable knowledge. But one is abstract while the other is personal. What modern science tells Western society about creation, our Indigenous "scientists" have been observing for millennia. What we can agree upon together is that the earth is changing, unnaturally, and it is not a good change.

DUALISM AND THE ORIGINS OF WHITENESS

When we think about the ongoing ecological damage to our world, we seldom consider white supremacy as a cause. Although the connection has certainty and is provable and logical, making that connection takes some explanation. Let's begin with the ideals behind whiteness itself. Whiteness, born in ancient Greece, is a 3,000-year-old mythological construction created to judge who is fit to rule. Christendom simply added the theological fallback: "who God made fit to rule."

The Greek philosopher Plato separated the idea of a thing from the thing itself, creating a duality between a thing's ethereal essence and its material existence. Platonic dualism places more importance on the ethereal than the material. Once dualism is a basis for reality, everything is seen in hierarchical order. Aristotle, a student of Plato, is sometimes referred to as the originator of whiteness. He categorized what he considered "natural" social placement based on something immutable about a person. There was an immutable essence, he said, that made some naturally suited for enslavement and some suited for ruling—and, not surprisingly, he considered the lighter-hued peoples, such as himself and his people, to be natural rulers.

Plato's student Alexander the Great was, among other things, an evangelist for Greek culture. Hellenism was spread by Rome and then Great Britain, and later romanticized in the West as the ideal form of civilization with the lighter-hued at the top of the social hierarchy. It included concepts of categorization that became a part of Western systems of "progress." Western Christianity and American systems of thought inherited and embraced a false value of separation rather than embracing a whole reality. In the Western mind—and Western worldviews are not limited solely to white people—one's "correct" beliefs even equate to action. The result for many Christians has been a theology rife with dualism that looks nothing like the teachings of Jesus.

Although Hellenistic influence can be found in the New Testament, Jesus did not seem to be terribly affected by it. Perhaps his rural Galilean childhood kept his more Hebraic and holistic worldview intact. A number of early church fathers, however, were influenced by Greek dualisms and hierarchies that directly shaped the church. Platonic dualism and racial hierarchies became even more distinct during

the Age of Reason, including the idea that Western, white, and male human beings are qualitatively different from and better than all other creatures, and qualitatively superior to nature herself.

These anthropocentric notions surfaced directly in pseudosciences such as race theory, craniology, and the modern eugenics movement. An array of false racialized theories was used to justify Native American genocide and African American enslavement. The false science of eugenics had a direct influence on Hitler's Jewish extermination plan, on tens of thousands of forced sterilizations of Black, Indigenous, and other women of color in America, and on the infamous Tuskegee experiments that intentionally withheld treatment from Black farmers with syphilis without their consent. Craniology, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, resulted in tens of thousands of Native American heads being severed from dead bodies and shipped to museums such as the Smithsonian, where many of them remain today.

When Western society wanted to use these now-debunked theories of Western science for economic gain, it used "blood quantum" to do so. African Americans could be enslaved as free labor with only "one drop" of African blood, whereas Native Americans, who they hoped would eventually disappear through assimilation, needed to meet much higher blood quantum to be considered "a real Indian" and obtain any treaty rights. The roots of this system of white supremacy fueled the Indian reservation system, residential boarding schools, Jim Crow laws, separate but "equal," and even modern maladies such as the school-to-prison pipeline and the use of excessive force on Black and brown bodies by law enforcement.

THE COST OF UNBRIDLED 'DEVELOPMENT'

What does all this have to do with our current climate and health crises? European-based white civilization, with roots tracing back hundreds and even thousands of years, views itself as the highest form of life on earth, meaning white people view themselves as the most valuable members of society. While explicit racial bias is no longer officially allowed in most schools, it continues to be taught simply by maintaining a system built for the benefit of white people. White supremacy, with notions of white privilege and white normalcy, still sits tall in the seats of

power—including Christianity—ensuring these systems continue.

These systems also relate to white people's relationship to nature. Consider the state of Western Europe 500 years ago. Most of the hardwood forest had been cut down to build fortresses, cathedrals, and castles; to heat iron for making tools; and to shape weapons of war. Western European urban centers were filthy from pollution, the rivers and creeks contaminated by human refuse and discarded animal remains. The fisheries, including bays and rivers, were becoming depleted, crime was rampant, large mammals were going extinct, and justice was mainly for the wealthiest 1 percent. I can understand why white Europeans wanted the unspoiled Indigenous lands that were being kept in harmony and balance with nature. Unfortunately, they did not adopt the necessary Indigenous worldview to maintain them. As a result, we are now experiencing an ecological crisis similar to, and more serious than, the Western European crisis in the mid-to-late Middle Ages.

Why more serious? The scale of extraction of natural resources has intensified through modern technologies via globalization. The global influence of white America's view of progress, resulting in unbridled development nearly everywhere, has created much of the ecological crisis, including public health crises around the world. Infectious diseases such as COVID-19, Lyme disease, hantaviruses, Ebola, and HIV, first infected people through what scientists

call zoonotic transfer or zoonosis, which occurs when animal-borne pathogens are spread to humans. This is often a result of environmental/ecological degradation that results in an imbalance in nature. Overcrowding nature through careless development, poisoning wildlife through agricultural sprays, and the pollution of land and water also decrease natural predators, which causes overpopulation in other species (often rodents), which increases their contact with humans. Under such strained conditions, zoonosis occurs. Without careful and well-thought-out plans, we will undoubtedly continue to suffer pandemics, as will our children, grandchildren, and their grandchildren—that is, if humans survive as a species.

What is a reasonable response to these facts?

WHY DIVERSITY MATTERS

If we are to survive the future, we must adopt a more sustainable and Indigenous worldview. We must understand our relationship to the whole community of creation, not just in terms of what can be extracted for utilitarian purposes. A bright future is one where we change our own thinking and that of our next seven generations from a Western, dualistic, hierarchical, competitive, wealth-driven, individualistic mindset to the kind of more holistic, equitable, cooperative, healthy worldview that Indigenous peoples have learned over thousands of years.

With white supremacy so deeply ingrained, it will be difficult for the West to swallow its pride. Continued devotion to the long march of white supremacy, dualism, false hierarchies, and embedded systems of racism not only keep the world divided, but they reduce our chance for survival. By losing Creator's intended relationship with nature, white society has lost its connection to a reality where God is in charge, where every species in creation is considered sacred, and where the well-being of the community is more essential than that of any individual's desires.

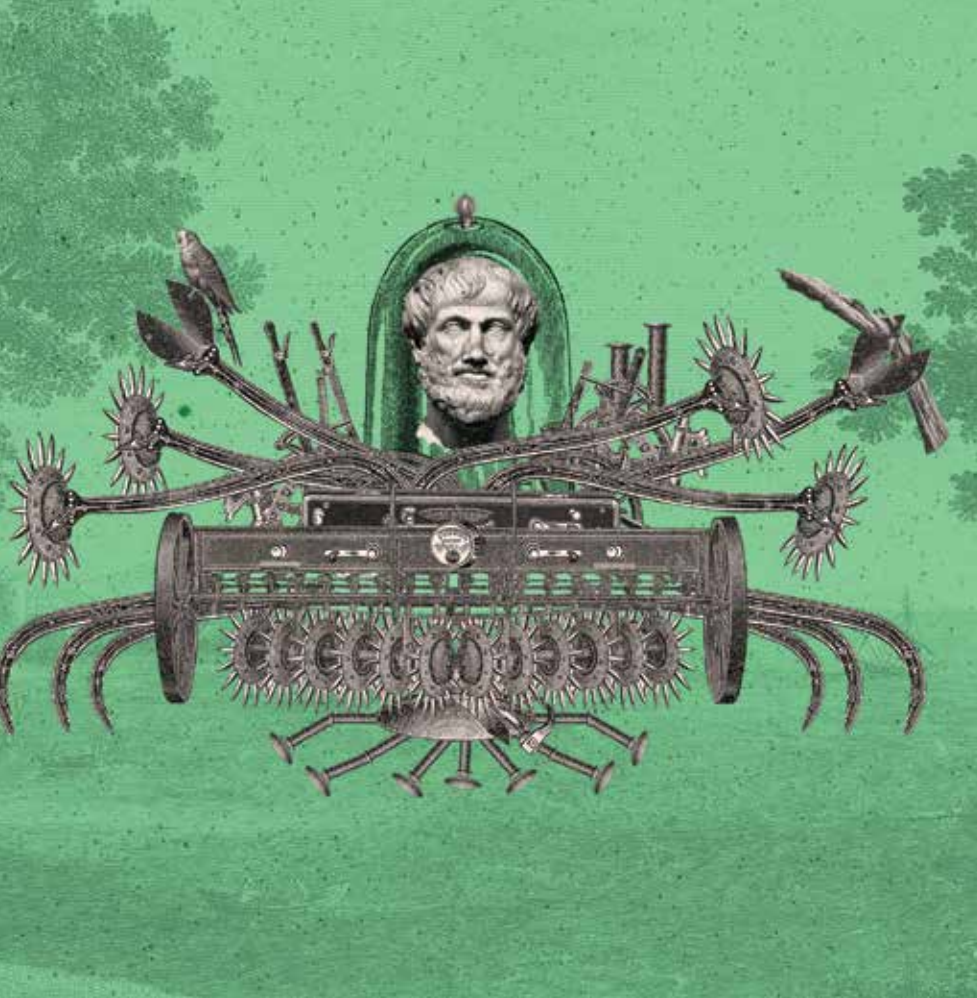
In the West, the world as it is ordered has forced isolation from creation and from the God who moves in and through the whole community of creation. When we consider the trees in places such as the Amazon rainforest, the Olympic Peninsula, the California redwoods, and the boreal forest to be less important to our oxygen supply than our lungs are to our respiratory system, we are in extreme danger. When coral reefs and plankton beds, the foundations of ocean life, become less of a concern than the raising of our own children, we may lose the opportunity to secure a future for any of them. To begin to think of the next seven generations affords us a chance to solve these problems together.

Western hubris has gotten us into our current climate crisis, backed by the false reasoning of racist philosophies and pseudosciences. Even when the theories and philosophies are proven to be false, white supremacy continues to move forward indiscriminately. Most people have no idea that by not making a change, they are maintaining a system of oppression based on notions of white supremacy. I must often remind myself: The journey is the destination; a thoughtful process is essential to producing the best outcome. For a thoughtful process to occur, we need all voices empowered at the table. This is where diversity comes in.

No two fingerprints are exactly alike. No retinal patterns are a perfect match. Our voices differ enough to allow voice-recognition software. I could examine a thousand sparrows and not be able to distinguish between them, but the differences are there. Each snowflake is different from the other. Each molecule on the planet is different than the next.

Homogeneity, or sameness, is an illusion that gives us all comfort at times. When we are around people like ourselves, we feel we can relax or are safe. Perhaps this sense of tribalism is a primal instinct carried forth in our DNA. And yet, when we

**WHAT MODERN SCIENCE
TELLS WESTERN SOCIETY
ABOUT CREATION, OUR
INDIGENOUS "SCIENTISTS"
HAVE BEEN OBSERVING FOR
MILLENNIA.**



examine anyone else closely, we find worlds of difference. Once we really get to know a person, we either learn to appreciate and even embrace the differences or we avoid or reject them. Embracing difference builds both character and community. Everything in the universe is diverse because we are made not only to live in the comfort and security of superficial sameness but also to explore and learn from differences. In Native America, this reality is often acknowledged by recognizing everything as our relative. Moral teachings that occur through story and ceremony teach us how to acknowledge and respect the community of creation by learning how we might become a better relative.

HEARING THE VOICE OF THE EARTH

One does not dare exploit a relative because the law of reciprocity shows that, over time, we may need help, and we would not want to be exploited. We should always consider what parts of the community of creation will be affected before enacting decisions. It was the land that taught our Indigenous people how to keep everything in balance, to reason just how much to use and how much to

leave. Edith, my spouse, grew up on the Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming. While our family picks berries, she often recalls, “Leave some at the top for the birds and some at the bottom for the mice and squirrels; pick mostly from the middle. That’s what my brother Tom used to teach us.”

My wife and I are farmers, and we always make room for the nonfarm creatures. Even on our smallest farm of 3.75 acres, we set aside a half-acre that was theirs, not ours. That little half-acre had a creek running through it, snowberries, rose hips, blackberries, and all sorts of trees, grasses, and plants. We tried to create an unmolested home for the birds and animals and all the creatures we couldn’t see from afar. We were rewarded often by seeing red-tailed hawks, woodpeckers, blue heron, manifold songbirds, rabbits, squirrels, deer, skunks, and even a visiting coyote every so often. Sure, we could have used that half-acre for something else, but we had to ask ourselves: How much is enough? How much land do we really need to succeed, and is it ever worth driving all the wildlife away? If we did that, our community would be poorer for it.

How we see history informs our worldview for today and the future. We turn

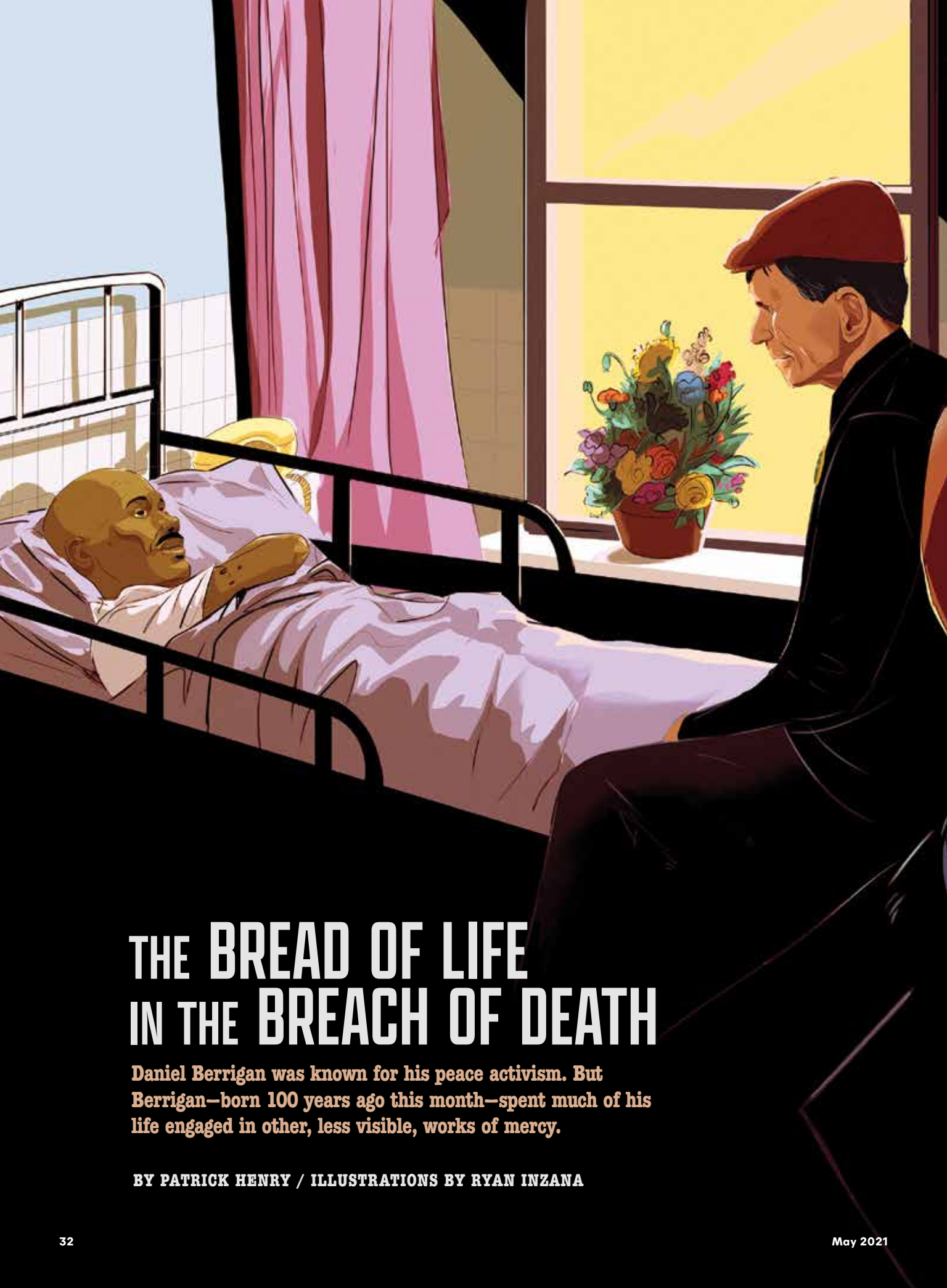
our understanding of history into our present reality. When teaching graduate students, I always began my history courses with this phrase: “There is no such thing as history, only histories.” We should always ask who is telling the story and why. The winners may write history, but there are many sides to every story. Our worldview should be shaped as much by what those often-subjugated voices have to say. Of late, the earth has been losing. When it comes to extraction, development, and war, the earth’s voice is seldom considered.

Ultimately, a utilitarian view of creation results in wanton destruction of the earth for the purposes of material gain. This attitude often crosses from the realm of nature to people. The way the Western world has historically treated the earth and how it has treated Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC), especially women, show remarkable parallels. A highly utilitarian view of people may explain why human life is valued so little by businesses that poison the earth and humanity (most often people living in poverty and communities of color). Consider the similarities in a Western worldview that seeks to control, objectify, and exploit nature, women, and BIPOC; expects production from nature, women, and BIPOC; and creates a rape culture targeting nature, women, and BIPOC. Invariably, the poorest and most marginalized people on earth suffer the most from corporate imperialism’s extraction, depletion, and poisoning of the earth’s natural resources.

True humility is the cure for what ails us. White supremacy must be converted from seeing whiteness as the most important value. White normalized systems of oppression and white people will need a large dose of humility to enable them to deconstruct their own power and sense of superiority from the existing structured systems of oppression.

Jesus taught his disciples to not rule over one another as the Gentiles do but instead that each should become the servant of one another. This humility applies to creation as well. Our future depends on treating the whole community of creation as our relatives. The question remains: How can we become good relatives? ♦

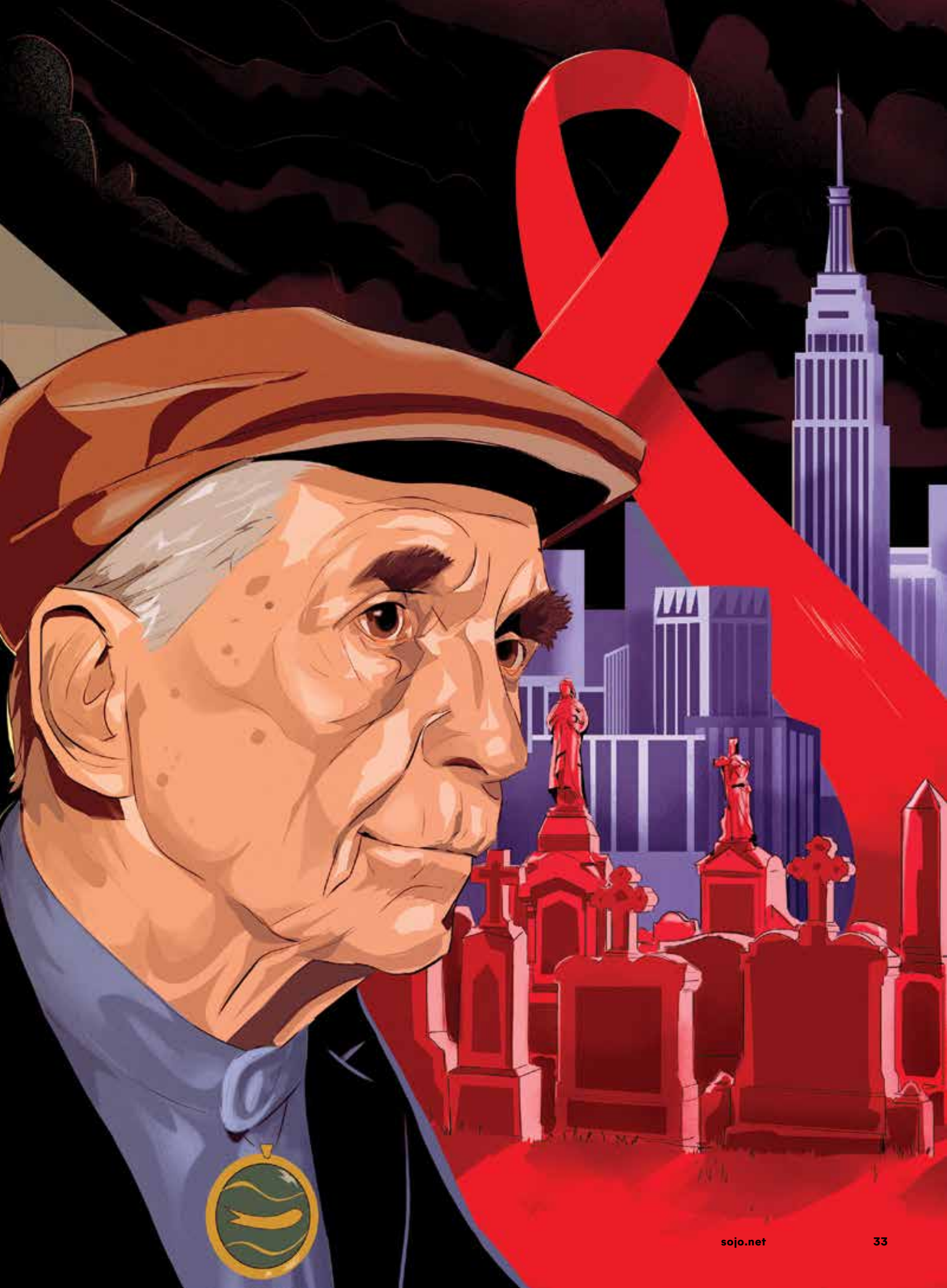
Randy Woodley is author of *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision*. His podcast, *Peacing It All Together*, can be found at peacingitaltogether.com.



THE BREAD OF LIFE IN THE BREACH OF DEATH

Daniel Berrigan was known for his peace activism. But Berrigan—born 100 years ago this month—spent much of his life engaged in other, less visible, works of mercy.

BY PATRICK HENRY / ILLUSTRATIONS BY RYAN INZANA



Daniel Berrigan was one of the best-known American peace activists of the 20th century. But there's a lesser-known aspect of his Christian commitment worth noting as we celebrate the centennial of Berrigan's birth on May 9: his work on behalf of the material and spiritual needs of New York City's "discarded souls," in particular those suffering the ravages of cancer and HIV/AIDS.

Berrigan's peace activism had deep roots. In 1964, he co-founded the Catholic Peace Fellowship. In 1967, he and his brother, Phil, became the first Catholic priests to be arrested for opposing the war in Vietnam. In May 1968, Berrigan and eight others, including Phil—in an act that would change the nature of Christian nonviolent resistance—entered Local Draft Board No. 33 in Catonsville, Md. The nine seized Selective Service records and burned them outside the building with homemade napalm. For these actions, recounted in Berrigan's play (and later movie) *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*, he served 18 months of a three-year sentence in Danbury Federal Prison.

In 1980, Berrigan took part in the first Plowshares action at the General Electric nuclear missile facility in King of Prussia, Pa., where, in a symbolic disarmament, participants damaged two nose cones of Mark 12A missiles and poured their blood on secret blueprints. Berrigan continued to protest the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the continued construction of nuclear weapons until his death in 2016.

Daniel Berrigan became a cultural icon, appearing with his brother on the Jan. 25, 1971, cover of *Time* magazine ("Rebel Priests: The Curious Case of the Berrigans"). Over the years, Berrigan, an award-winning poet, published more than 50 books of poetry, plays, social criticism, and, above all, biblical and religious commentary. He taught at Fordham, Yale, Columbia, and Loyola University New Orleans, reaching thousands of students with his message of nonviolence. Actor Martin Sheen, who was arrested dozens of times with Berrigan, claimed that Dorothy Day got him back to the church

and Berrigan kept him there. In 1986, Berrigan appeared in Roland Joffé's film *The Mission* and began a close friendship with the film's star, Jeremy Irons, whose son he would baptize. Berrigan's May 6, 2016, funeral at St. Francis Xavier Church in Manhattan was attended by hundreds of people, including Dar Williams who sang "I Had No Right," the song she had composed for Berrigan years before.

Berrigan's work with people at the end of their lives is a less celebrated, but no less important, part of his story.

KEEPING SANE ON A "SHIP OF FOOLS"

From 1979 to 1984, Berrigan cared for the dying as a volunteer at St. Rose's Home in Manhattan. St. Rose's housed at no charge 50 patients who were terminally ill with cancer and who came to the home to die. In *We Die Before We Live: Talking with the Very Ill*, Berrigan describes his experiences there, washing bodies, emptying bed pans, feeding the dying, and listening to and praying with and for them.

The staff was dedicated to making people's lives bearable, comfortable, and lively for as long as they lasted. "No one is forced-fed," writes Berrigan, "whether on religion, psycho-semantics, or antics" and "there are no state snoops because there is no state money." St. Rose's was simply "a laboratory in dying," a "ship of fools" sailing on heroically while Berrigan and the other orderlies "bail, row, weep, swab the decks, change beds, ferry in the newly arrived near dead, and try to keep sane."

At St. Rose's, Berrigan found what he saw as the true church where, enveloped by the ever-present stench of cancer,

the gospel was practiced. A mystical union formed between the orderlies and the dying. Berrigan offered consolation and tried to help the dying make peace with themselves and others. Why did he begin volunteering at St. Rose's? He felt something was lacking in his life of "teaching, writing, and pilgrimaging to the Pentagon to throw ashes and blood at the idols." He didn't go to St. Rose's as a chaplain dispensing the sacraments. He went to "greet" the dying, "hold their hands ... talk to them, learn from them ... dressed in old clothes, ready for whatever service seems required or helpful ... and to be found in the right place when the Lord comes."

SNAPSHOTS OF COMPASSION

Like draft board centers and St. Rose's—sites where people were legally declared marginal and ready for death—St. Vincent's Hospital in Greenwich Village was another stop frequented by Berrigan. Here he worked on and off for roughly 12 years with people dying of HIV/AIDS, which from 1981 to 2001 would take the lives of 450,000 Americans—75,000 of them New York City dwellers.

Many people with AIDS were scorned, isolated, exiled, shamed, and treated like lepers. To Berrigan, the Catholic Church's attitude—exemplified by supposedly biblical denunciations that God's wrath had descended upon people with AIDS for their "unnatural" lifestyles—was "a very whiff of brimstone." In the thick of these condemnations, St. Vincent's responded instead to the gospel's call to love. Working with many LGBTQ doctors and nurses, the staff consistently fought homophobia, pushed for sensitivity training and the compassionate treatment of all patients and the patients' loved ones, and saved thousands of lives.

Sorrow Built a Bridge: Friendship and AIDS records Berrigan's experiences working at St. Vincent's, where most of the patients were Catholic. To those suffering from intolerable pain, shame, betrayal, and ostracism, the Supportive Care Program's staff did their best to offer "care and caring, nursing and nurturing, medicine and ministry." There is understandably a general tone of sadness throughout this 1989 book, which interweaves dialogue and Berrigan's richly imagistic, poetic prose of witness.

Berrigan provides narrative snapshots of a dozen or more young and formerly vigorous men whom he came to know. Some-

times it's an unnamed person referred to only as a "drug abuser" who contracted AIDS through needles, or a woman who asks Berrigan to visit her ex-husband who she is taking care of, the man completely wasted by AIDS. Berrigan brings the man Communion, and the man asks Berrigan to, as Berrigan puts it, "hold his face in my hands." Berrigan celebrates the woman and paints a scene where neither anger nor conflict is allowed the last word: "He, she, and I, the bread of life in the breach of death, the banishing of fear, a healing that surpassed unimaginably the skills of this world."

More snapshots: To Berrigan, Paul is "another Job," the suffering prophet, who asks to be confirmed before he dies and murmurs on his deathbed, "I'm going home, I'm going home." Frank, a "Lazarine corpse," full of purple lesions and a nose blown up like a clown's. Oscar, whose whole body is ravaged by AIDS, is a "hanging thread of a man," whose hand Berrigan holds at his bedside. Ambrose, writes Berrigan, is a combination of "sweetness and innocence," a childlike being but, unfortunately, a Job-like being as well.

The first AIDS patient Berrigan meets, a young artist named Donald, hauntingly appears as "the mold of death." Mike is an endless talker who makes of Berrigan "a listener of last resort." An actor and teacher of acting, he has abandoned the religion of his youth ("no end of threats, punishment, hellfire") and has found the Quakers and, on occasion, the Methodists. Berrigan brings roses and a book, holds his hand, and listens. Robert, whose brother also has AIDS, has lost 18 friends to the epidemic between 1984 and 1987, a period during which he had attempted suicide. Born Episcopalian, Robert converted to Catholicism and worked for the church hierarchy for years. Now he is back with the Episcopalians. He asks Berrigan to be part of his funeral service in the Episcopal Church.

Berrigan seems to adapt so well here that we need to reflect for a moment on the unimaginable anguish of witnessing the slow, inexorable disintegration of young men, one after the other. His time caring for people with AIDS constituted "a dark night of unknowing ... all menace, a greater darkness in the darkness." Under these circumstances, establishing friendship was never easy. All friendships were either appointed ("Would you kindly visit my son or my friend?") or forced (You knock on a door, make contact, then come when called.). "So much had to be

taken on faith, on both sides."

More poignantly, all friendships were temporary and ended with death, which always followed the inevitable cycle: down and out, up again, usually only briefly, then down for good. Appropriately, Berrigan writes: "I must rein in my grief, lest it pull me under." Despite the myriad difficulties involved for both the patient and the volunteer, Berrigan—who particularly looked

after the young and those without families—offered friendship and consolation.

**"WHO COULD HAVE DREAMED
SUCH A BLESSING?"**

Berrigan's words paint several unforgettably moving portraits of people with AIDS he got to know well at St. Vincent's, people he later visited in their homes and for whom



**BERRIGAN KNEW HE NEEDED TO
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HE FOUND THERE.**



he sometimes cooked dinner in his own apartment. Luke was a student in a Jesuit school where Berrigan had lectured. He had become a master chef, trained in France, and had had a successful restaurant in Brooklyn. We find him at death's door in St. Vincent's, with his parents at the foot of his bed, the family's Calvary. "Luke is the peacemaker in our family," his mother tells Berrigan. All they want is for him to die "a good Catholic." Berrigan assures them that their son is "already seeing to that." Luke is resigned and has accepted his fate. His only wish is that his parents, too, will accept his death and not grieve for him. Berrigan, who had at first lashed out with a "Why have you forsaken me?" at "The God of silence ... the God of no comment" at the foot of this cross and unable to offer formulas to comfort those suffering, would finally find God in Luke's courage and belief in the face of death, and in the steadfast faith of Luke's parents.

Richard, another Catholic, a former brother in a religious order who has left the church behind, is a slow-moving, serene 40-year-old. He had been a carpenter and plasterer until he was no longer physically able to work. Berrigan met him too late to become a friend, but he invited Richard and Andrew, Richard's friend,

to dinner in his apartment with another person with AIDS. Andrew had been a friend of Richard's for years and visited him in the hospital. Two years earlier, when Richard was discharged from the hospital, he had nowhere to go. "He had no one," Andrew explains. "And I thought, Yes, he does. He has me." Andrew took Richard home, without a thought or an inkling of what a heavy burden he had assumed. This completely stunned and humbled Berrigan: "I hadn't heard it before," he muses, "and yet I had. Dorothy Day 'took people home.'" But "this Jesuit has not so far done so. And is by no means proud of the confession."

Walking the halls of St. Vincent's, Berrigan knew that what he needed was to listen, to witness, to console the abandoned, suffering souls he found there—and to help them find peace by reconciling them with themselves, their families, if possible, and, if they suggested, with God. He was richly recompensed for his efforts, repeatedly witnessing extraordinary instances of love, sacrifice, and commitment in persons afflicted with AIDS, which enabled him to imagine a new, faith-strengthening cycle of suffering, birth, and rejoicing. "Who could have dreamed such a blessing?" he

exclaims. "More to the point, who could have deserved it?"

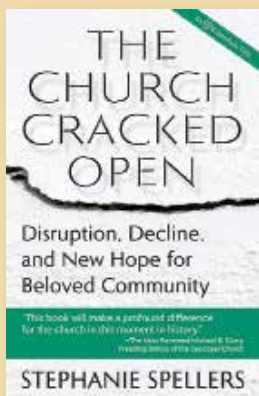
In his 1973 book *Absurd Convictions, Modest Hopes*, Berrigan claims that "The kind of religion [that he and his brother practice] takes its start around the clues offered at the altar but tries to end up amid the needs of real people." His "works of mercy" have spiritual roots emanating from a religious impulse that follows the divine command to reach out to the marginalized and the destitute dying and to find God in them.

Ultimately, as Berrigan makes clear, these works affirm St. Paul's notion that we are all members of the same body. Berrigan's compassionate work at St. Rose's and St. Vincent's, as well as his nonviolent resistance to war and nuclear weapons, must also be understood through the lens of the spiritual works of mercy. Together, they instructed the ignorant, counseled the doubtful, forgave offenses, comforted the afflicted, and were actualized prayers for the living and the dead. ✦

Patrick Henry is an emeritus professor at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Wash., and has written about Daniel Berrigan for *Commonweal*, *National Catholic Reporter*, and *Shalom: Jewish Peace Letter*.

GREAT READS / Books to inform and inspire

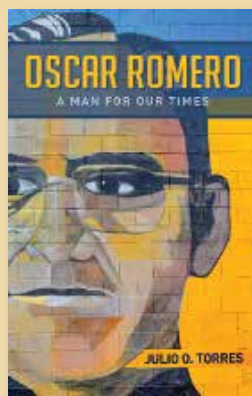
SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION



The Church Cracked Open: Disruption, Decline, and New Hope for Beloved Community

Stephanie Spellers
Church Publishing
Available wherever books and ebooks are sold

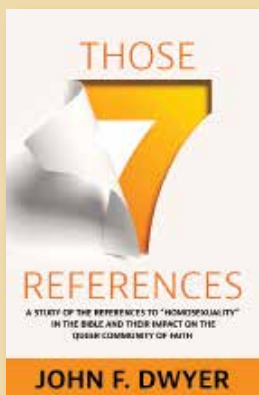
"If you are looking at the landscape of the church and wondering, 'How'd we get here?' and what's next, I invite you to board Rev. Spellers's plane. Take in the history, the theology, the pain, the beauty, and the hope that her view from thirty thousand feet offers. When she lands the plane, you'll realize—there's simply no better guide out there."
—Nadia Bolz-Weber, author



Oscar Romero: A Man for Our Times

Julio O. Torres
Seabury Books
Available wherever books and ebooks are sold

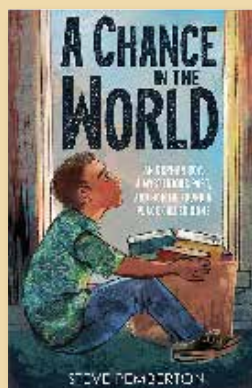
An in-depth portrait of Oscar Romero, the fourth archbishop of San Salvador, based on research of Romero's diaries and sermons as well as interviews with those who knew him. Torres takes readers into Romero's early life, his seminary formation, and his active ministry, including conflicts with the ruling elites and hierarchy, to provide a greater understanding of this complicated and prophetic man.



Those Seven References: A Study of the References to "Homosexuality" in the Bible and Their Impact on the Queer Community of Faith

John F. Dwyer
Morehouse Publishing
Available wherever books or ebooks are sold

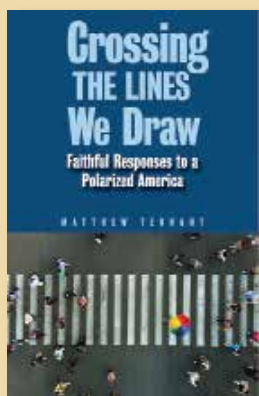
"John Dwyer masterfully navigates the reader through a biblical journey of rediscovery... This is a must-read not only for the LGBTQIA+ community but also for anyone who seeks to be an ally in the building of the Beloved Community."—The Rt. Rev. Deon K. Johnson, Eleventh Bishop of Missouri



A Chance in the World (Young Reader's Edition)

Steve Pemberton
Tommy Nelson
amazon.com

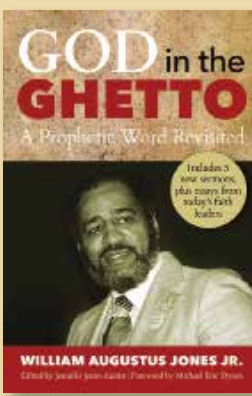
A light-skinned boy with blue eyes, a curly Afro, and a Polish last name, Steve Klakowicz is taken from his mother and forced to live with a cruel foster family. Can he build a better life and find out more about his past? A compelling, true story for middle schoolers.



Crossing the Lines We Draw: Faithful Responses to a Polarized America

Matthew Tennant
Judson Press
judsonpress.com

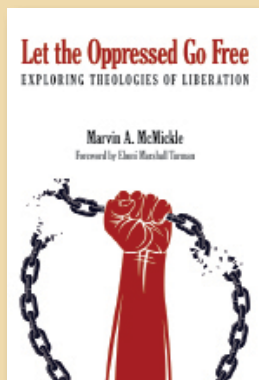
Offers scriptural insights to develop strategies that will equip people of faith to cross the lines in meaningful dialog within their congregations and in the communities where they live, work, and minister to others.



God in the Ghetto: A Prophetic Word Revisited

William Augustus Jones Jr.
Judson Press
judsonpress.com

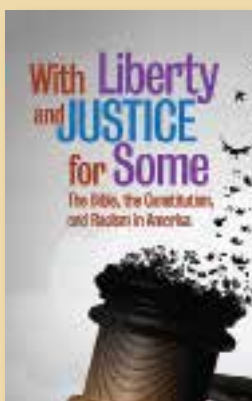
This revised edition includes William Augustus Jones' seminal analysis of systemic racism, the integral role of the church in birthing and perpetuating it, and the Black church's response. And features several never-before published sermons of the preaching giant, and contributions from Michael Eric Dyson, Michael A. Walrond, and other notable leaders.



Let the Oppressed Go Free: Exploring Theologies of Liberation

Marvin A. McMickle
Judson Press
judsonpress.com

Explores and examines the evolution of liberation theologies in their historic and cultural contexts. Discussing the Black theology of James Cone, the theologies of Latin American liberation, feminist scholars, the womanist movement, and women in ministry, this book breathes with lived faith and practical theology, acknowledging the contexts out of which theologies of liberation emerge and the transforming impact they have on the social and political lives of Christians today.



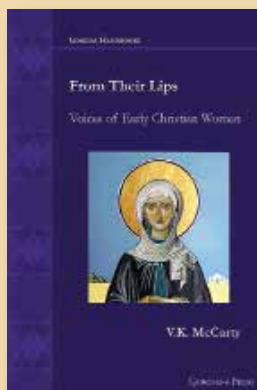
With Liberty and Justice for Some: The Bible, the Constitution, and Racism in America

Susan K. Williams Smith
Judson Press
judsonpress.com

This book examines through a historical, theological, and exegetical lens how our foundational documents have been used to further racism and oppress people of color. And it offers a firm foundation for questioning our own beliefs and actions toward bringing about equality and justice for all.

GREAT READS / Books to inform and inspire

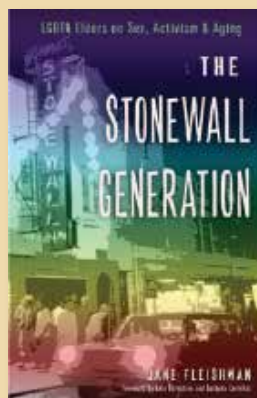
SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION



From Their Lips: Voices of Early Christian Women

V.K. McCarty
Gorgias Press
gorgiaspress.com

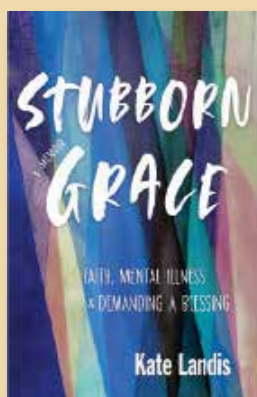
From Their Lips is an engrossing collection of female voices from the earliest days of Christianity. These fascinating women speak out boldly about their compelling love of Christ, their adventures in church leadership, their secret prayer techniques, and their often underreported contributions to the first centuries of church history.



The Stonewall Generation: LGBTQ Elders on Sex, Activism, and Aging

Jane Fleishman
Skinner House Books
bookshop.org

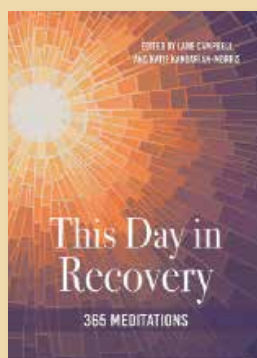
Sexuality researcher Jane Fleishman shares stories of fearless elders in the LGBTQ community who came of age around the time of the Stonewall Riots of 1969. In candid interviews, they lay bare their struggles, strengths, activism, and liberation in the context of the politics of the 1960s, 1970s, and today.



Stubborn Grace: Faith, Mental Illness, and Demanding a Blessing

Kate Landis
Skinner House Books
bookshop.org

Through activism, Kate Landis found a community with justice at its core and a faith to hold her mental illness, her fire, and all of her questions. With unflinching honesty and humor, Landis chronicles the hardest parts of young adulthood as well as her poignant journey to faith and community.



This Day in Recovery: 365 Meditations

Editors: Lane Campbell,
Katie Kandarian-Morris
Skinner House Books
bookshop.org

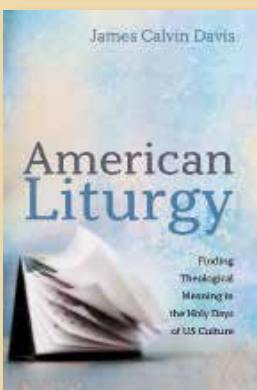
Short, daily experiences to help bring readers back to their spiritual center in moments of struggle and questioning. Featuring collected daily quotes, reflections, and questions, *This Day in Recovery* is a thoughtful and powerful spiritual tool for those in recovery and their families.



The Little Boy Who Cried Wolf: The Complete Story

Kevin Cripe
Self Published
innovativechildrensbooks.com

How do you explain the politics of the last several years to children (10+)? The garish culture of celebrity and worship of money have led people to a toxic river to be baptized in. This book, with discussion questions, can help explain what went wrong.



American Liturgy: Finding Theological Meaning in the Holy Days of US Culture

James Calvin Davis
Cascade Books
amazon.com

Can the "holy days" of American culture help us understand what it means to be Christian and American? In timely essays on a year of holidays, this book explores how faith convictions and civic concerns should converse with and critique one another, for the betterment of both church and culture.



Spirituality & Social Action

Andy Harris
Wipf and Stock Publishers
spiritualityandsocialaction.com

Spirituality & Social Action puts our faith on the line as we respond to the seismic changes shaking the foundations of our society, including COVID-19, racial injustice, economic disparity, violence, polarization and climate change. The grace of God and our personal faith are keys to healing, reconciliation, and transformation.

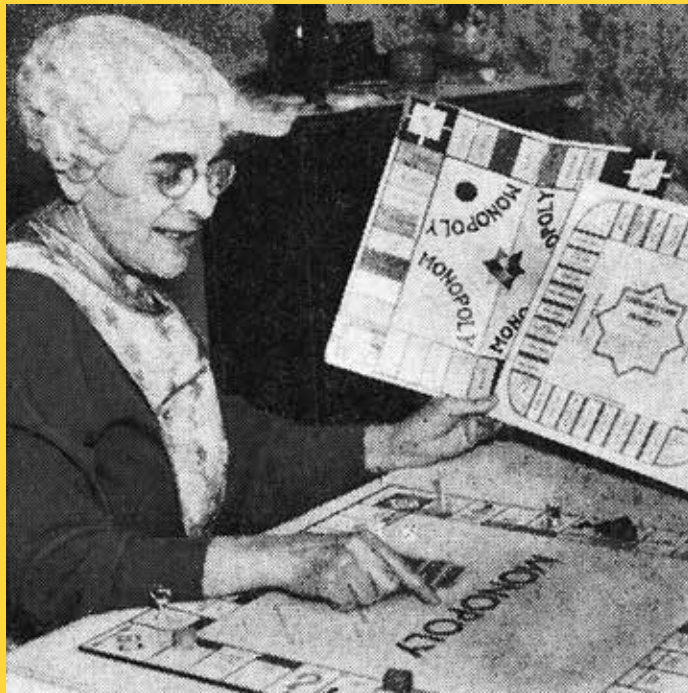


2020s Foresight: Three Vital Practices for Thriving in a Decade of Accelerating Change

Tom Sine and Dwight J. Friesen
Fortress Press
amazon.com

We are no longer simply living in changing times. We live in the reality that we are racing into a new world of accelerating change. Leaders in churches and Christian organizations need foresight, reflection, and innovation to advance God's purposes in our lives, neighborhoods, and churches in the 2020s.

BOARD GAMES CAN BRING OUT THE BEST IN US, BUT WHAT SHALL WE PLAY?



W

When Elizabeth Magie invented The Landlord's Game, known today as Monopoly, she drew up two sets of rules: one "monopolist," employing fierce competition

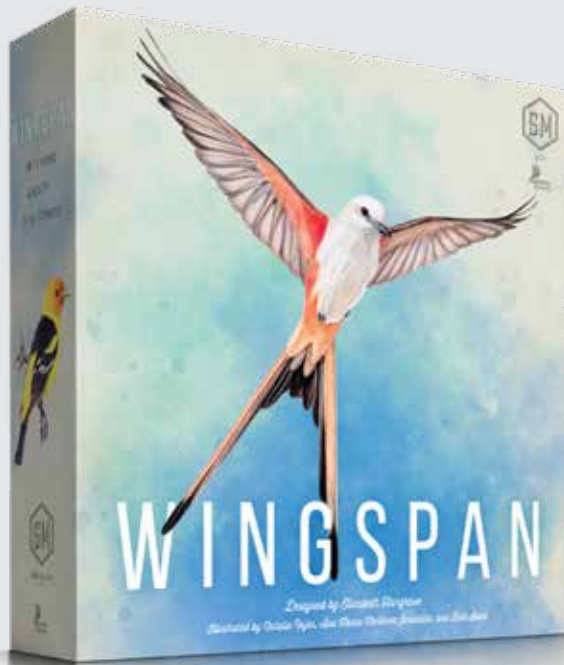
and cutthroat property snatching, as the game is played today; the other "anti-monopolist," namesake of a larger movement intended to demonstrate the dangers from unregulated wealth accumulation by the few and economic inequity in the late 1890s. Magie hoped that soon "men and women will discover that they are poor because Carnegie and

Play

Rockefeller, maybe, have more than they know what to do with."

For Magie, daughter of an abolitionist and anti-monopolist, game creation was not simply an innocent pastime. She resonated with how games could provide a way to envision a new reality and usher in robust ideas.

When I was in college, several of my



classmates in a world Indigenous literature class talked about how games we grew up playing—from Monopoly to Settlers of Catan—embodied settler colonialism and capitalism. In Settlers, the goal is to build as much as you can in unoccupied land and accumulate resources. In Monopoly, you aim to procure ownership of as many properties on the board as you can, raising rent to force other players into bankruptcy while you elude jail. Ticket to Ride-USA encourages players to build railroads across the United States, invoking the forces of manifest destiny without a critical lens. Jamaica is a board game where European pirates surround the island and battle for the most resources. Bang! The Dice Game catalogs life in the “Wild West,” where the French, Mexicans, and “Indians” fight each other; one dice roll can “save” a player from an “Indian attack.”

In contrast, Elizabeth Hargrave’s blockbuster board game Wingspan invokes a vision beyond possession and mastery of people and creation. In Wingspan, I played an ornithologist, research biologist, bird watcher, and creation caretaker all at once. Wingspan comes with cards that display unique illustrations of 170 distinct North American birds, and there are expansion packs for Europe and Oceania continents. One to five players can partake, and the object of the game is to welcome birds into your bird sanctuary. Although the competition can be as friendly or as fierce as players wish, it’s not merciless. There are four different actions: play a bird, gain food, lay eggs, or draw a bird from the deck. It takes a while to catch on, but for someone who loves to collect information and

play multistep strategy games, it is perfect.

While there are few landscapes untouched by the extractivist economics of colonialism—the impetus for the very existence of wildlife sanctuaries and conservation efforts—games such as Wingspan free us to imagine ourselves more fully in a symbiotic relationship with nature.

The games we play can be part of our theological imagination, too. We can move beyond fantasies and game boards where we strive to own boardwalks and the largest settlements, to instead care for the earth and practice interdependence. Willie James Jennings presents whiteness as a “way of being that is detrimental to the world.” What way of being in the world do the games of our childhoods communicate? The process of decolonizing our game shelves is not just a surface-level fix; it can be a deeper spiritual process. Games can be tools of remembrance, history, and cultural survival. They can be tools of protest, prayer, and presence.

Elizabeth LaPensée is an Anishinaabe artist, designer, and writer who uses Indigenous art to create digital/computer games and conceptualize ways of engagement that are outside of settler norms and traditional modes of competition. They draw on Indigenous methodology and encourage collaboration, cooperation, and listening.

In Coyote Quest, players learn and utilize Indigenous science. In award-winning Thunderbird Strike, players control the Thunderbird to protect Turtle Island from tar sands and the great Snake—oil pipelines. (With the creation of this game, LaPensée faced legal trouble in Minnesota for inspiring “ecoterrorism.”) Singuistics: Anishinaabemowin engages players in language learning and preservation through singing.

LaPensée’s work offers examples of intentional gameplay for both critiquing social systems of harm and creating a new future. The historical narratives present in games such as Singuistics: Anishinaabemowin give context and tell stories of Indigenous survival of and resistance to Manifest Destiny, which contrasts with Indigenous erasure upheld by other games. LaPensée’s creations illustrate alternatives to the colonial legacy of “accumulation by dispossession” that is woven in the fabric

**GAMES CAN BE TOOLS
OF PROTEST, PRAYER,
AND PRESENCE.**

cont’d on page 45

SEEN, HEARD, KNOWN

By Abby Olcese

The last chapter of Hebrews in the New Testament begins with a reminder of how to serve God and build a healthy community: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (13:2). Biblical hospitality takes many forms, but it consistently involves selfless sharing of space, resources, and—perhaps most importantly—attention. To share part of your life with another person, and allow them to share in return, is to show that they matter.

Nomadland, Chloé Zhao’s contemporary American road film, is full of biblical hospitality. By turning a documentary-style eye on a real community of nomads who otherwise slip through the cracks of society, writer and director Zhao’s film—which won 2021 Golden Globes for best motion picture and best director—provides its actors/subjects with space to be seen, heard, and known.

Like *The Rider*, Zhao’s previous film, *Nomadland* combines elements of narrative and documentary filmmaking by crafting a story around the lived experiences of real people. Our guide, Fern (Frances McDormand), leaves her home in Empire, Nev., to live on the road. Fern is part of a subculture of older adults who, left in dire financial straits by the 2008 recession, live in vans as modern-day nomads, picking up gig work across the country. As Fern travels, she makes friends with several fellow nomads (most of them real people playing themselves) who share their stories with her.

Early in Fern’s journey, she attends a meetup for fellow van-dwellers to share tips, trade items, and build commu-

nity. Later, some of them provide lifesaving help. Others bring valued companionship. All are open about the circumstances that have brought them together and their hopes for the future. Here, hospitality doesn’t always look like sharing a table or a roof. Instead, it’s about sharing each other.

By allowing these characters to talk about their real lives throughout the movie, *Nomadland* supports this ethos, providing a platform for an overlooked population. A woman named Swankie tells Fern she hopes each of her friends will throw a rock into a campfire to remember her after she dies, which she does by the film’s end. Zhao allows Swankie’s memory to live on through the film. It’s an especially moving act of hospitality, a gift of attention—an acknowledgment that she has value.

Nomadland is defined by this humbling approach to hospitality. For 107 minutes, Zhao invites a series of strangers into our hearts and asks us to consider how we might do the same. It is an example of empathy as both a spiritual and artistic practice, opening the door to people who seek not charity, but dignity. ❖

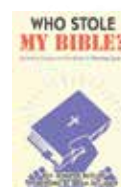
Abby Olcese (@abbyolcese) is a freelance film critic and writer based in Kansas.

Frances McDormand in *Nomadland*

CAPTURED BEHIND BARS

Filmmakers in Iran risked arrest to help document *Nasrin*, a compelling portrait of Iranian human rights lawyer and political prisoner Nasrin Sotoudeh. The film highlights her activism and the power of the Iranian women’s rights movement today.

Virgil Films



Return to the Roots

Who Stole My Bible? Reclaiming Scripture as a Handbook for Resisting Tyranny, by Jennifer Butler, remedies authoritarian misrepresentations of the biblical mandate for justice. This practical guide dissects nine Bible stories and presents tools for embodying faith as liberation.

Faith in Public Life



A Lyrical Memoir

Amyra León’s poetry volume *Concrete Kids* offers melodic, honest verse on childhood in Harlem, foster care systems, loss, and love. This book is from the Pocket Change Collective series, intended to give space for young adults to be themselves and explore activism.

Penguin Workshop

SAILING HOME ON A LOST SHIP

by Faith-Marie Zamblé



Curated

I May Destroy You, Michaela Coel's brilliant 12-episode series released last summer on HBO (and BBC One), chronicles the haphazard recovery of millennial writer Arabella Essiedu after she survives a sexual assault. In

Coel's hands, Arabella (played by Coel herself) is never reduced to a battered woman or a perfect victim. She remains, throughout, entirely human—as do her friends and family. Watching the show reminded me of a line from Bertolt Brecht's *Messingkauf Dialogues* in which an actor protests that he cannot play both “butcher and sheep.” Coel seems to disagree. Her Arabella is both warm and wildly narcissistic, armed with a righteousness that often wobbles into unbridled megalomania.

I May Destroy You is a champion of nuance. Although rape is allowed its own category of awfulness, Coel, as writer, draws her audience into other situations that aren't so clear cut. Each episode is as compassionate as it is damning of human selfishness and myopia. Considering how little mainstream television centers the trauma and healing of Black women (much less with complexity), the critical acclaim Coel has accrued thus far is not surprising. Unfortunately, as is so often the case with art made by people of color, Black women in particular, this acclaim has yet to materialize in awards. I have mixed feelings about awards, especially when the diversity conversation in Hollywood seems in love with its own stagnancy. However, that doesn't mean awards aren't nice to have, or that their conferral signifies nothing; awards often

**WHAT IS MORE DARING
THAN TALKING ABOUT YOUR
EXPERIENCES IN A WORLD
THAT IS TRYING TO ROB YOU
OF LANGUAGE?**

reveal the white cultural establishment's willingness to give something up. After all, if *I May Destroy You* gets nominated for a [insert trophy here], “Memily in Maris” might not win!

As you may have deduced, my impetus for this column was the Golden Globes' snub of *I May Destroy You* while giving a nod to the amusing though shallow *Emily in Paris*. But the more I've thought about this issue, the more it seems that Coel's goals can't be measured in shiny objects—even if they are thoroughly deserved. Through her excellence and ambition, Coel is performing a kind of experiment on us, one designed to help us heal. When we talk about “experimental” work, we often look to surreal arthouse films, yet what is more daring than finding a way to talk about your experiences in a world that is trying to rob you of language?

Last week, in a virtual studio visit, one of my classmates shared Assata Shakur's poem “Affirmation.” The last few lines still follow me. “I believe in birth,” Shakur writes. “I believe in the sweat of love / and in the fire of truth. / And i believe that a lost ship, / steered by tired, seasick sailors, / can still be guided home / to port.” In *I May Destroy You*, Arabella and her best friend, Terry, say to each other, like a liturgy, “Your birth is my birth. Your death is my death.” It feels as if they might also be talking to us. The project in both cases is empathy, an affirmation that our fates are intertwined, whether we wish them to be or not. We are the “tired, seasick sailors,” our society the “lost ship,” and Coel is reminding us that we can—and must—make it home. ♦

Faith-Marie Zamblé is an artist, writer, and M.F.A. candidate in dramaturgy and dramatic criticism at the Yale School of Drama.



**NONVIOLENCE IS
A LIFELONG PROJECT
OF BECOMING.**

activism, and trauma work, illustrating how we might embrace nonviolence to transform both ourselves and our world.

In a society threaded with violence and injustice, Haga suggests it is not enough to simply resolve to be nonviolent. We must be strategic. We must prepare. We must, as he says, “practice ten thousand ways to turn the other cheek.” This is where Kingian nonviolence as learned and taught by Haga comes in, for it presents nonviolence as both a philosophy and a toolkit.

Haga draws on biographic anecdotes and historic details to convey the great breadth of what nonviolence can be. From direct action employed to highlight systemic inequities to more compassionate ways of disagreeing with those who don’t share our views, in Haga’s interpretation it is as much about rooting out the violence that lives in our own hearts as about making institutional changes that address the realities of structural racism, inequality, and the like.

With this broad vision of nonviolence, Haga

brings together social justice activists, whose primary focus is systemic change, and those in the helping professions, who have traditionally concerned themselves more with repairing intra- and interpersonal relationships than remedying social ills.

Though Haga’s book is structured around Kingian nonviolence principles and skills, this vision is larger than any dogma or philosophy. It’s a grand moral vision very much in the lineage of King. As such, it is not bound by the discrete ends of any particular political program. For Haga, nonviolence is a lifelong project of becoming; it is a day-by-day, step-by-step journey toward the Beloved Community, a community committed to personal and social change, where justice reigns and we are all deemed worthy. ✦

Jon Little is a freelance writer based in Wellington, New Zealand.

‘TEN THOUSAND WAYS’

Healing Resistance: A Radically Different Response to Harm,
by Kazu Haga

Parallax Press

Nonviolence. When you hear the term, what do you think? In your mind’s eye, what do you see? Black and white newsreels of college students dressed in their Sunday best, picketing segregated businesses? Perhaps you imagine Gandhi’s historic salt march to the sea or Martin Luther King Jr. leading the faithful onto the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma.

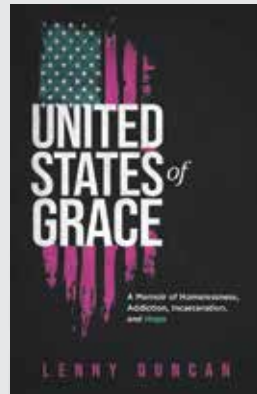
It’s not uncommon to hear “nonviolence” and think “protest.” There is much value in this association. History demonstrates that nonviolence can be an effective tactic for promoting political change. But in *Healing Resistance: A Radically Different Response to Harm*, Kazu Haga shows us that it can be much more than a political tool.

Haga—a nonviolence trainer and founder of East Point Peace Academy in Oakland, Calif.—was influenced by the Kingian nonviolence principles and curriculum of Bernard LaFayette Jr. and David C. Jehnsen (who co-wrote this book’s foreword). Haga weaves these principles with lessons from Buddhism, social justice

HITCHHIKING IN VIRGINIA

An excerpt from *United States of Grace: A Memoir of Homelessness, Addiction, Incarceration, and Hope*,
by Lenny Duncan

Broadleaf Press



A

America is the crucible, the forge, the hammer beating me out of shape. Or into a new shape. But the fire is all God. A fire that is untamable, that has been harnessed and misused but not conquered by the powers that be. God's mercy is the force that kept breath in my body as I tried to dash my life against the rocks. It's Resurrection. Moments

like that snowy day in Virginia, when the world conspired to drag me by my hair, kicking and screaming, toward life.

My life has followed a trajectory of grace: the specific route God used to reach me that was built through a series of actions and events piling up and creating a spiritual momentum that I couldn't avoid, duck, or hide from.

The truth is nothing went perfectly to get me from where I was on Feb. 12, 2010, to where I am today, sitting in a random coffee shop in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn, putting my story down in words for you, a stranger.

I was picked up by an immigrant who barely spoke English. I knew enough Spanish to explain I was headed to the hospital. That I was sick. He barely understood me, but he knew I needed help. He took me to his home and woke up his wife so she could translate. I explained that I was an alcoholic looking to get to a hospital to get sober. That I was sorry I disturbed her. I remember her conveying my words and the look of sad realization in his eyes. He said something to her, and I gathered my things expecting to be put out. Who the hell wants to help a stranger with something this big? *This scary*. She said he wanted me to stay the night and he would take me to a hospital in the morning if I still wanted to go. I was so struck by this invitation that tears welled up in my eyes. I gratefully passed out on the couch.

I woke up, and God was still real. At this particular moment, God was a 5-year-old girl in a pink onesie with a plush bunny at her side, and God was staring me right in the eyes. I wasn't sure where I was, but it all flooded back to me. Including the powerful feeling that my life had a new direction. Her father smiled at her as he walked in, and

they served me breakfast. My hand shook so bad, I couldn't get the eggs in my mouth. Who knows if I could hold it down. I was grateful for the gesture though. Being treated like a human when I had experienced so little of that in my life was utterly amazing.

After he finished breakfast—I couldn't finish mine—he took me to a store and was kind enough to let me buy two tallboys to keep the demons from crawling up the walls. It is my sad duty to report that my last drink was two tallboys of Sparks, the energy drink/malt liquor. After I slammed them down greedily, he dropped me off at the hospital.

That's America. That's the America I know. A Black queer kid sticks his thumb out in Virginia, and an immigrant takes him into his home, introduces him to his family, and then drives him to the rest of his life. This is what I want to show you. ♦

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**I WOKE UP, AND GOD
WAS STILL REAL.**



cont'd from page 40 of the United States and the Americas. Moving toward collaborative gaming “goes against our inner ‘specialness,’” says adrienne maree brown, because we are “socialized to seek achievement alone”—championing our idea, our strategy, our project against all contenders and climbing through organizations until we ultimately, ideally, come out on top: most successful, most published, most recognized.

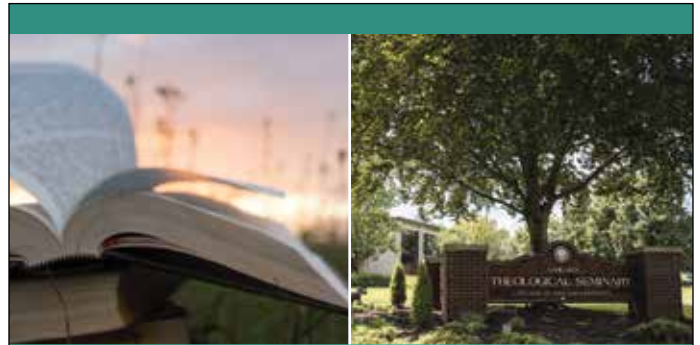
This is a recipe for loneliness, brown notes. “If we are all trying to win, no one really ever wins.” Maybe this seems too serious when thinking about gameplay—but in life, if only one person wins, what happens to the rest of humanity? What is there to be said about the image of God in those who are the “losers,” the disinherited, the dispossessed?

When we examine how the striving of individualism has failed us time and time again, the way of collaboration beckons. Collaborative gaming stretches our theological imaginations in a way akin to the vision for community recounted in Acts 4:32-35.

Intentional, thoughtful games have the capacity to usher us into the theological imagination of incarnation—the collaboration of our humanity with the divine in order to birth something new in the world: new ways of being, doing community, and occupying the earth. Games are microcosms and can be testing grounds for what works, and what doesn’t.

Maybe that sounds too deep for a Sunday afternoon game of Monopoly, but I think of Jesus’ words: “Whoever is faithful with little will also be faithful with much.” ❖

Ashley Ver Beek is a *Sojourners* editorial assistant.



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ANTHROPAUSE

By Gretchen Bartels-Ray



If we believe nature will mend,
it will replenish what has been taken and,
answering the wild call of urban space,

dolphins will return to Venetian canals,
elephants will drowsy dream in Chinese tea gardens,
humans will shed their fear and guilt to hope and taste

the terror of responsibility
the *terroir* of ourselves
the *terra ignota* of a paradise where

buffalo are returning to the china shops,
burros are roaming wild in the taco trucks, and
cows are returning to the sea.

In the pause, though, we can hear
Creation creaking and groaning, and
I tell you, she is never spent.

Gretchen Bartels-Ray is an associate professor of English at California Baptist University. She lives in San Diego.



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THE SPIRIT'S NOMADIC WORD

Scripture passages
are from the Revised
Common Lectionary,
Cycle B

By Isaac S. Villegas



Living the Word

Do we know what we even mean when we say “God”? In the wake of the crucifixion, with our theological grammar shattered on Golgotha—where, in Jesus, God died—the events

of Easter have us fumbling for new words.

To speak of our faith involves piecing together syllables into phrases that venture to say the unimaginable. The resurrection shocks us out of familiar patterns of thinking about God—an unsettling of our minds but also our lives. That is what we see on Pentecost: a bewilderment. People lose control of their tongues. The Spirit dispossesses the leaders of their power over communication. God reorders their movement with the invitation of the gospel. Pentecost morning concludes with an evening of food and fellowship, “the breaking of bread and prayers,” communion among strangers (Acts 2:42).

The Holy Spirit instigates a reformation of our communities as part of how we articulate the Word of God. “We need to find a new language,” writes Catholic theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether in *Sexism and God-Talk*, “that cannot be as easily co-opted by the systems of domination.” Habits of life accompany habits of speech. The events of Pentecost reveal a Spirit who refuses to honor our hierarchies of authority, of who represents God. From this primal episode in Acts, the church becomes a movement that transgresses the borders between insider and outsider, neighbor and foreigner, friend and stranger.

You never know who might surprise you with the truth of God. Anyone can “speak as the Spirit gives them utterance” (Acts 2:4, KJV).

Isaac S. Villegas is pastor of Chapel Hill (N.C.) Mennonite Fellowship and president of the governing board of the North Carolina Council of Churches.

WHAT WE SEE ON PENTECOST IS A BEWILDERMENT.

MAY 2

UNRULY VINES

ACTS 8:26-40; PSALM 22:25-31;
1 JOHN 4:7-21; JOHN 15:1-8

“**I am the vine**, you are the branches,” Jesus tells his disciples in John’s gospel (15:5). The vines behind my house creep along a fence, then trespass into my neighbor’s yard to crawl onto the roof of a toolshed and jump into the tree canopy. There’s a wildness to vines, which Jesus offers as a metaphor for his movement in the world.

The twists and turns of Christ’s vine lead Philip on “a wilderness road” (Acts 8:26). He travels without a plan—until the Spirit interrupts with a command: “Go over to this chariot” (verse 29). There Philip finds an Ethiopian eunuch—a foreigner with a queer sexuality—and the two engage in biblical interpretation, which leads to the Ethiopian’s request to join the people of God. “What is to prevent me from being baptized?” he asks (verse 36).

Like a shoot of a vine dangling at the trellis’ edge, Philip wonders if this baptism will reach outside the divine plan for the church. On the one hand, scriptures forbid eunuchs from entering the assembly of God’s people (Deuteronomy 23:1). On the other hand, scriptures welcome eunuchs into God’s house (Isaiah 56:4-5). To include or to exclude—either way, Philip could use the Bible to justify his decision. What does he do? Philip chooses the wild love of Jesus. If the branch bears fruit, then the church will know that this experiment in faithfulness is part of the true vine.

MAY 9

GOD’S FRIENDS

ACTS 10:44-48; PSALM 98; 1 JOHN 5:1-6;
JOHN 15:9-17

“**I do not** call you servants any longer,” Jesus tells his disciples, “but I have called you friends” (John 15:15). Their relationship status with Jesus has changed. His

announcement confounds their religious imaginations and theologies of power. Jesus refuses to be a master. He will leave behind a community of friends, not of slaves.

Human creatures are not enslaved to Christ by fear. “I think that modern atheism since Nietzsche is a rejection of the idea that the deepest truth about [human-kind] is that we are slaves,” Dominican theologian Herbert McCabe preached in a Good Friday sermon. “For the Christian tradition, the deepest truth about people is that they are loved.” Jesus’ friendship abolishes any trace of a master-slave dynamic at play with God and us. “God loves us because we are in Christ and share his Spirit,” McCabe continued. “We have been taken up to share in the life of love between equals which is the Godhead.”

Jesus reveals the noncoercive love that is the life of God—the One who desires our companionship: without hierarchy, without imposition, without dominance. Christ has made us friends of God. “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16). He has chosen us to love the world as he does.

MAY 16

OUR LOVESICK GOD

ACTS 1:15-17, 21-26; PSALM 1;
1 JOHN 5:9-13; JOHN 17:6-19

By the time we get to this Last Supper scene in John 17, Jesus has been talking for four chapters. Whenever he gets to what feels like a good conclusion to his point, he rambles on, sometimes repeating himself word for word.

As I read these chapters, an episode from the 1990s TV series *Friends* flashed into my mind. Ross (played by David Schwimmer) wanders around the living room while on the phone with his girlfriend, Julie (played by Lauren Tom), then plops on the couch next to Rachel (played by Jennifer Aniston), who rolls her eyes. “Okay, you hang up. No, *you* hang up, no you, you, you, you,” Ross says to Julie over the phone. “Okay, I’ll hang up at the count of three—one, two, three ... You’re right, I didn’t hang up! *You* hang up, no *you*.” Finally, Rachel, beyond annoyed, snatches the phone and ends the call. Shocked, Ross pouts.

In John’s gospel, Jesus just can’t say goodbye. He knows his time with his beloveds will soon end but he won’t let them go. His words fill the air because Jesus can’t bear the looming emptiness, the agony of separation. He pleads to God for them, for their safety, for their enduring companionship even though he knows everything will change at dawn. He spirals into madness at the thought of a future without them. In John’s gospel, Jesus’ story is one of a lovesick God. The incarnation is a doctrine about a God who fell in love with the world.

MAY 23

MIGRATORY SPIRIT

EZEKIEL 37:1-14; PSALM 104:24-35;
ACTS 2:1-21; JOHN 15:26-27; 16:4-15

God’s presence surprised Jesus’ friends with a rushing wind, alighting on them with the fires of heaven and inspiring them to speak in languages they did not know. The multitudes of visitors to Jerusalem heard them in the streets. “At this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each” (Acts 2:6). The people are “amazed and astonished” (verse 7), “amazed and perplexed” (verse 12) at the sounds of their homeland now in this foreign city.

I remember when a staff person at a Christian youth camp made fun of another Latino kid and me as we played together and spoke Spanglish. “I bet you two can’t even do math in American,” he chided. “You best be speaking English here.” The absurdity confounded me at the time, as if numerals and mathematical rules differed in Spanish and English. But the racism was clear. The Christian counselor’s scolding taught me that to speak in Spanish in the U.S. has been racialized as a refusal of U.S. Euro-nationalist culture.

THE INCARNATION IS A DOCTRINE ABOUT A GOD WHO FELL IN LOVE WITH THE WORLD.

At Pentecost, God does not impose a common language. Instead, God affirms human differentiation as holy: “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh” (verse 17). The book of Acts tracks the migration of the Holy Spirit as the gospel of Jesus Christ wanders through peoples and across lands, flowing from one body to another—a nomadic gospel that trespasses borders and cultures.

MAY 30

THE BODY’S SIGH

ISAIAH 6:1-8; PSALM 29;
ROMANS 8:12-17; JOHN 3:1-17

When I think about the Trinity, my thoughts turn to the heavens—to an unimaginable God, beyond my comprehension. The apostle Paul, however, begins much closer: in our groaning. “We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit intercedes with groans too deep for words” (Romans 8:26). The location of the trinitarian life of God’s self is the human being at prayer—the Trinity inside of us, in our body’s sighs, our wordless prayers. “When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” Paul theologizes, “it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (verses 15-16).

God’s Spirit befriends our spirit. The inner life of God dwells within our interior life. In prayer, in our groaning, we become a home for all three persons of the Trinity. God lives with us, in us, not as some outside power, not as a cosmic clockmaker, not like royalty on a throne in heaven. Instead, Paul uses the language of pregnancy to describe God in us—all of us “groaning in labor pains” (verses 22-23).

We are like Mary, God born in our lives, the gospel in our flesh. “We are all meant to be mothers of God,” Meister Eckhart preached in the 14th century, “the Son of God begotten in us.” Each of us undergoes the travail of the Holy Spirit, awaiting Christ’s birth in our lives.

The presence of the Trinity in us starts with a sigh, the wordless longing for redemption. ✕

“Preaching the Word,” Sojourners’ online resource for Bible study and sermon preparation, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

H'rumphs



WHERE HAS THE TIME GONE?

By Ed Spivey Jr.

This is my last column for *Sojourners* magazine. After 46 years as art director, I'm going to call it a day; 16,910 days, to be precise. (Sadly, another month and I would have been vested. So close.) After almost a half century, I'm finally leaving this good work and these wonderful colleagues so I can spend more time with my phone.

I mean my family.

I know this will be a shock to my readers—both of them—but, and how can I put this? ... it's not you, it's me. Not that my readers are blameless. Over the years they have at times been merciless in their criticism, such as doubting the veracity of conversations I reported between Jesus and God (I have the tapes!), or faulting my righteous skewering of Mike Pence and Jerry Falwell Jr. (I miss them already.) Not to mention the personal medical conditions I helpfully shared but, alas, were cruelly mocked and unappreciated.

On the other hand, my work *has* received numerous honors from professional journalism organizations. Of course, modesty prevents me from listing these accomplishments, which are as follows: Dozens of design and writing awards, including many for First Place in Humor. But I shouldn't have mentioned that. I apologize. A man's worth is not measured in awards. What's important is that some of those awards came in lovely frames, suitable for permanent display. Which I would have done, proudly exhibiting my value to *Sojourners*, but there's no room in the dinky little office they gave me. (Maybe I can display them in my dinky little house.)

But I can't rest on my laurels (not without a good cushion). The world wants to know what you've done for it lately, so I'll need to keep up my award-winning pace in retirement. I

THIS ISN'T GOODBYE, IT'S ...
WELL OKAY, IT'S GOODBYE.

could become one of those internet influencers followed by millions for advice on fashion and lifestyle. (When the cardigan sweater comes back, it will be me who leads the charge.) And I'm available to serve on corporate boards of major companies. Under my leadership, ExxonMobil could switch to, say, organic farming. I bet they haven't thought of that.

I plan to keep writing, and I already have some book ideas, including *The Art of the Nap* (*Life Is Long; Why Stay Awake During the Last Part?*). And it goes without saying I'll publish a memoir. The inherent drama of a man who worked at an office for more than four decades—eating lunch at his desk every day—would have made Dostoevsky tremble at the literary possibilities. The deep layer of crumbs underneath my workstation are not those of a careless chewer but the inevitable consequence of a fully involved intellect, a wordsmith who, unashamedly, thinks with his mouth open.

Speaking of literature, I hope to finally read those Great Books I've put off for so long. And by read, I mean watch the movie version on TV. (When *Anna Karenina* comes out with pictures, *that's* when I'll pick it up.)

I'll also have more time for my granddaughter. Overparenting can inhibit a child's growth, but overgrandparenting is a gift. To that end, I plan to spoil her so rotten she'll have to be refrigerated.

And I'll continue my lifelong commitment to peace and justice, making my voice heard and taking to the streets when called for, as long as there's a bathroom every three blocks. (And I'll have to be home in time for *Wheel of Fortune*.)

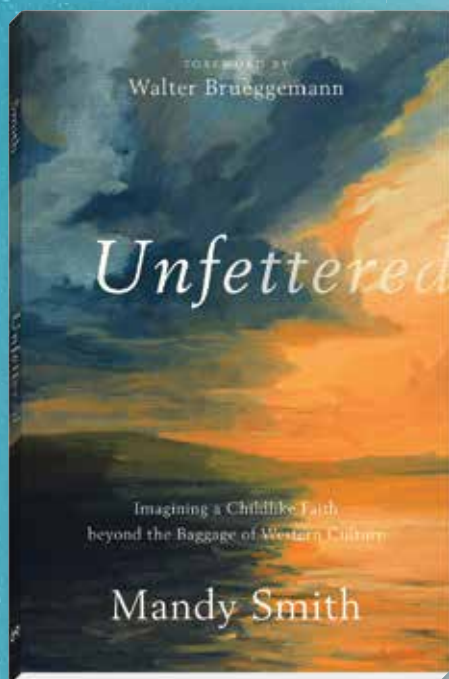
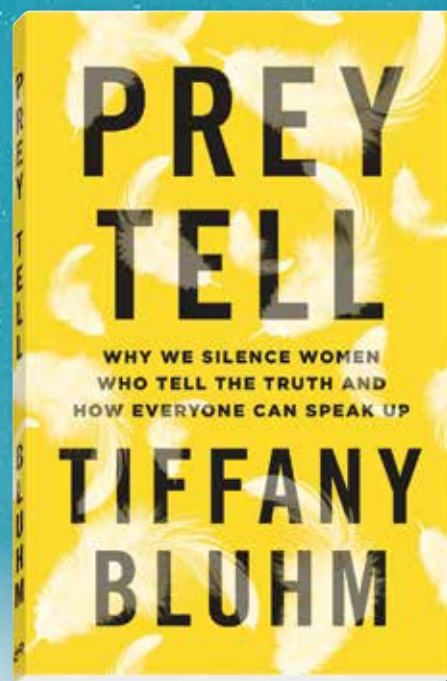
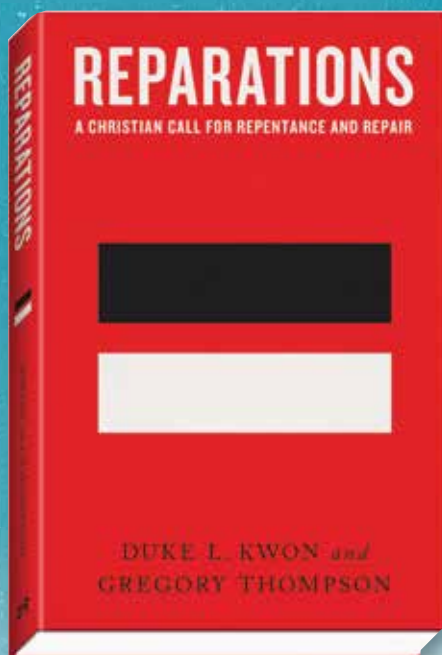
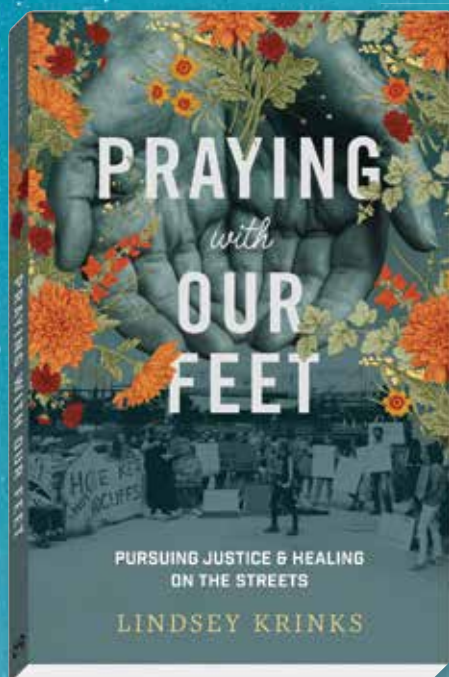
I have spent most of my adult life at *Sojourners*, and it would require a super-spreader event to thank all who have been a part of that journey. So, I'll just offer a heartfelt air hug to my colleagues. I'll never forget you.

Because I'm taking a stapler. ❖

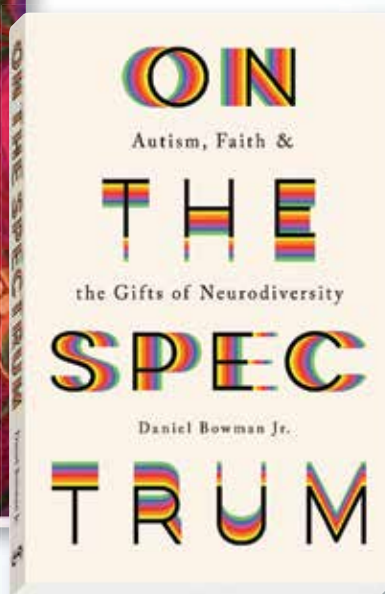
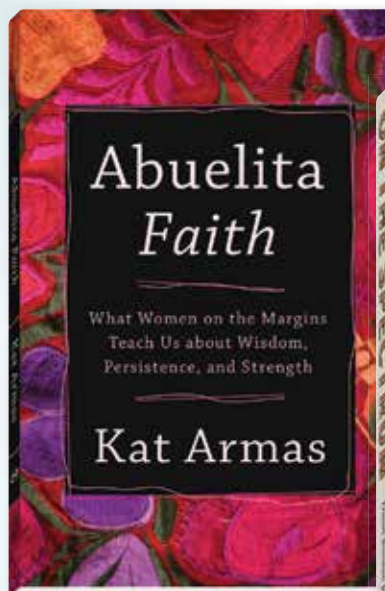
Ed Spivey Jr. was art director of *Sojourners* magazine from October 1974 to February 2021.

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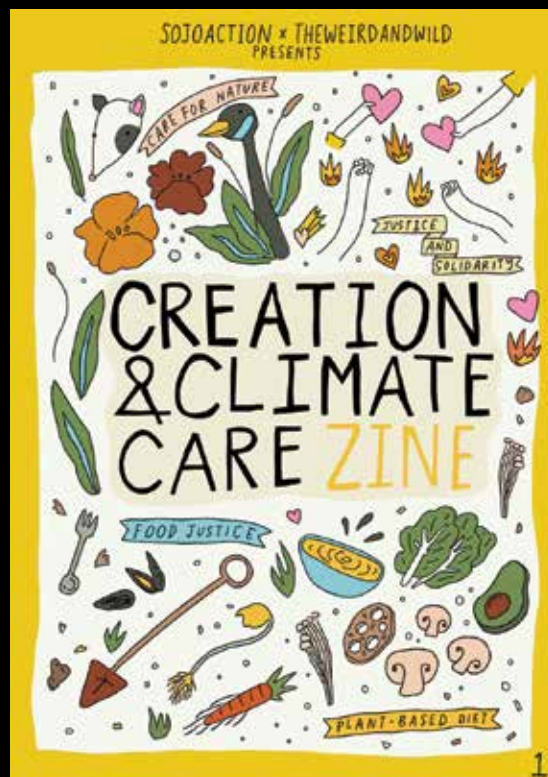
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